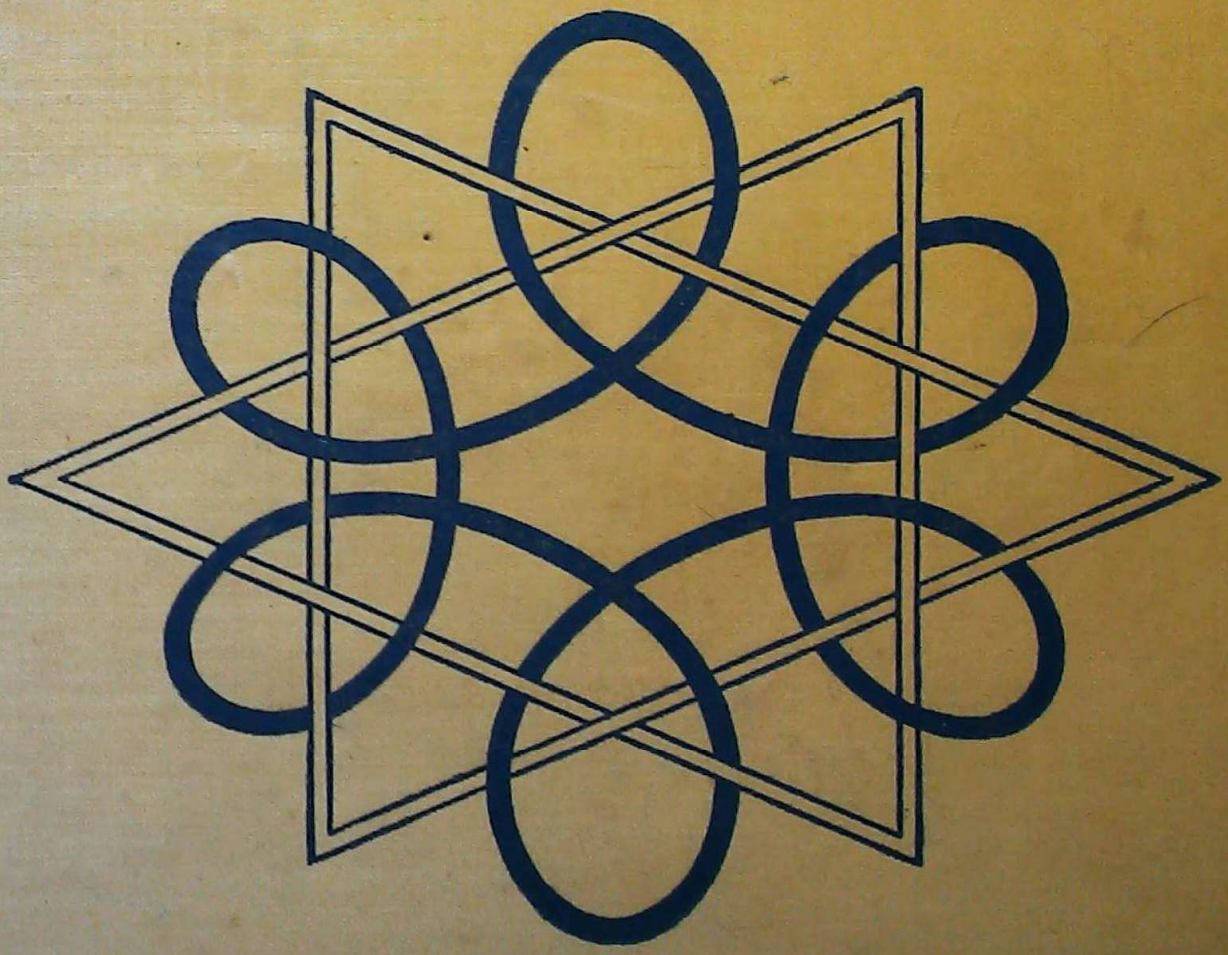

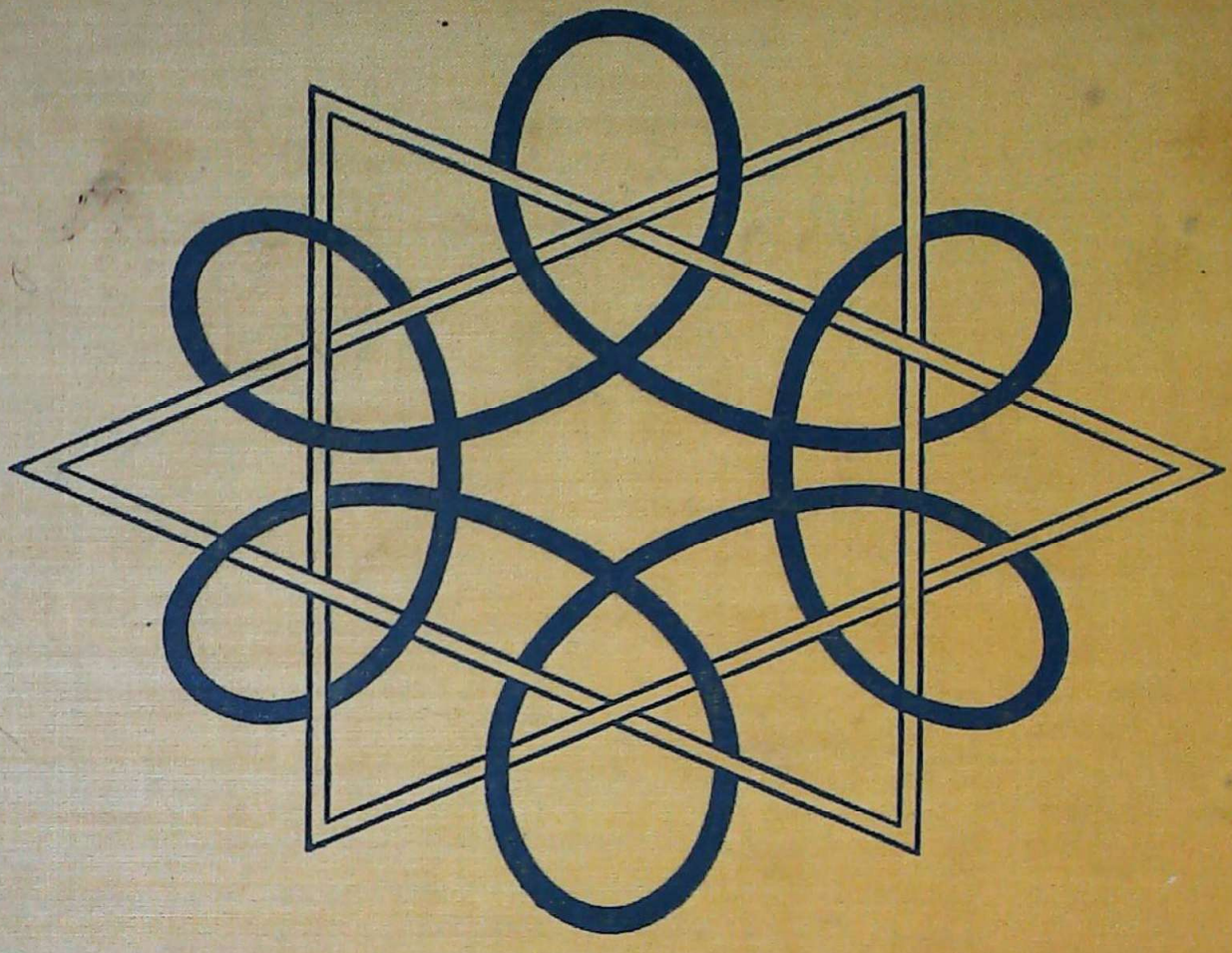

THE GREAT RABBI LOEW OF PRAGUE

BY

FREDERIC THIEBERGER

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THE GREAT RABBI LOEW OF PRAGUE

HIS LIFE AND WORK
AND THE LEGEND
OF THE GOLEM

WITH EXTRACTS FROM
HIS WRITINGS
AND A COLLECTION OF
THE OLD LEGENDS

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I

INTRODUCTION

DURING the sixteenth century all the intellectual currents of the time met in Prague, in the heart of Europe. Amongst the non-Jewish population of Bohemia and Moravia there were many denominations. The "Bohemian Brethren", the successors of the Hussites, and the Utraquists, closely connected with them, received many new adherents from the Lutherans. Of the three million inhabitants of Bohemia only ten per cent were Catholics, but they were strongly supported by the Habsburg Emperors, especially in the second half of the century, when the counter-reformation and the systematic educational work of the Jesuits had secured a dominating influence in the Administration and in the University. The sovereigns at that time were much dependent on the support of the aristocracy, who had to sanction the yearly budget and provide for covering it. These conditions favoured the Jews, who played the role of voluntary or involuntary lenders. They lived in comparative political freedom in their cramped walled-in ghetto and were directly subject to the Royal Chamber. It is true that they were compelled to wear the yellow badge, that few articles were left to them to trade in, that pogroms were instigated and expulsion orders issued, but the worst could always be averted by playing on the threat of Turkish aggression and by the religious wars amongst the Christians. Also

there was a certain humanitarian attitude amongst the sovereigns. Ferdinand I, the little, pale prince with a Spanish education, to whom his powerful brother Charles V transferred the Austrian territories in 1526, inherited also Hungary and Bohemia. In his youth Ferdinand had been in contact with Erasmus of Rotterdam, whose influence again and again made itself felt as a check on his fanaticism. On his intercession Ferdinand repeatedly withdrew expulsion orders against the Jews and allowed a certain amount of freedom to the Christian sects.

This humanitarianism was even more pronounced in Ferdinand's eldest son and successor, Maximilian I, who came to the throne in 1564. The Bohemian aristocracy, which was composed mostly of non-Catholics, felt itself under the new liberal king to be recapturing its former power. For the Jews this meant an alleviation of their position in face of the counter-reformatory attack issuing from Vienna. In 1567 an imperial edict was issued cancelling the former expulsion orders, and in 1571 the Emperor and his wife paid a visit on foot to the Jewish quarter of Prague. In commemoration of this unusual event, on the spot where the guests were welcomed by the Rabbi and heads of the Community under a canopy, there was subsequently erected the Klaus Synagogue, which became the college of the Great Rabbi Loew.

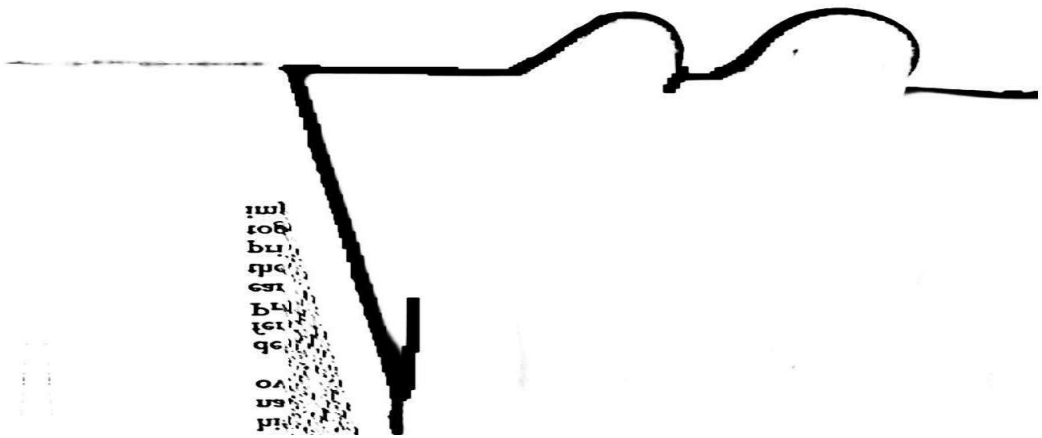
Towards the end of the year 1567 Maximilian died and his son Rudolf II reigned in his stead. He was one of the strangest of sovereigns, a bachelor, very reserved, suspicious, avoiding intimate intercourse with friends and officials. From early youth he was subject to melancholy, but towards the end of his life the very consciousness of his solitude invested him with a certain tragic grandeur. In those days of the Turkish War and religious confusion, the reins of Europe should have been in strong and safe hands. But Rudolf was taken up with matters of the mind; he was rich in knowledge, a linguist, a lover of the arts and sciences. He called to his court painters of repute such as Hufnagel and Jan Breughel and the etcher Sadeler. For the Swedish astronomer Tycho Brahe, he created near Prague an observatory of the latest type, and attached to him the Wurtemberg genius Johann Kepler. Close to his castle in Prague, where he resided permanently from 1582, he built a special street with dwellings and experimental kitchens; the Alchemists' Street can still be seen today.

The removal of the Imperial Court to Prague brought to the Jewish community there added importance and better protection. Owing to the fact that personal access to the Emperor was difficult—even high dignitaries were denied audiences—anti-Jewish elements, such as Jesuits, communal councils and trade guilds, were kept in check. It was known that the Emperor desired to leave the Jews in possession of the moderate freedom granted to them by his predecessor. He even went further: for instance, Maximilian had forbidden the Jewish furriers to make fur coats or even dresses with fur trimmings, but in 1580 Rudolf allowed the Jews in all Bohemia to trade freely and repealed the restrictions applying to the furriers. On the other hand he renewed the edict that the Jews had to wear on their attire the yellow badge of identification, and in 1585 he even sanctioned the expulsion of the few Jews in Schönberg in Moravia. Still on the whole there was more light than

shade in this twilight of relative freedom. Prague was a great centre for the whole of Judaism.

Intercourse between the Jews of the various countries at that time was much closer than it came to be since the nineteenth century. They were much more homogeneous than in the period following the emancipation. Even the division between Sephardim and Ashkenazim became acute only later. Italian scholars, in particular physicians, could be met with in Germany and Poland, Bohemian Rabbis in Italy or Turkey. The Rabbis Katzenellenbogen of Padua, Jacob of Worms (the uncle of the Great Rabbi Loew) and Eliezer Treves of Frankfort on Main were commissioned by the Emperor Ferdinand to work out the order of elections for the Jewish community of Prague. Moses Isserles was asked in Cracow to give decisions which deeply affected the life of the Amsterdam community. It made no difference to the circulation of books within the Jewish world whether they were published in Venice, Prague, Amsterdam, Salonika or Cracow. Their common Hebraic culture, historical consciousness, legal and political worries, and national aspirations, kept together a people dispersed over continents.

Some time before 1514 a printer called Gerson, a descendant of the famous printer of that name, had transferred Hebrew type and a printer's press from Soncin to Prague, and brought with him the artistic taste of the early Italian printers. The Emperor conferred upon him the privilege of acting as the sole Hebrew printer. This privilege descended to Gerson's son Mordecai, who together with his five sons, issued in Prague the most important works of the sixteenth century. This printing



press published the greater part of the writings of the Great Rabbi Loew and in 1592 the Chronicles *Zemach David* by David Gans. At the end of this latter work there is a notice concerning Mordecai Maisl, and his first and second wife. Judging by the text and the arrangement of the print, this is a kind of dedication to the great Maecenas who apparently enabled the Chronicles to be published. Thanks to successful trading transactions, Maisl had become, as far as is known, the richest Jew in Central Europe. He lived all his life in Prague and died there without issue in 1601, at the age of seventy-two. In an official document he is praised for his "faithful and fruitful services" to the Emperor and to the Supreme Governing Body. For many years he was the President of the Jewish Community of Prague. At his own expense he erected there several synagogues, a hospital, and an almshouse, and carried out the paving of the main streets. It is also known that he donated to the Communities of Posen, Jerusalem, and Cracow a sum of 10,000 guilders each. (An idea of what such a sum represented may be derived from the fact that at that time a fattened ox cost five guilders.) The personal devotion of Maisl to the Great Rabbi Loew was of great service to the latter's educational activity. Maisl built the Klaus Synagogue for Rabbi Loew and no doubt it was he who was instrumental in arranging the recall of the great Rabbi to Prague. The certified copy of Maisl's will, which was executed a few months before his death and which can still be seen, bears the signature of Rabbi Loew who was then already very old. Possibly the Rabbi had some influence on the distribution of the legacies: it is related that Maisl's

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requested Rabbi Loew to distribute such a large amount of money amongst the poor.

The pilpulistic method* of study which had been founded in Prague by Jacob Pollak continued to flourish there till far into the second half of the sixteenth century. At the same time, however, there was no lack of interest in modern non-Jewish branches of study. David Gans was a typical example of such interest. The new ideas, knowledge, and outlook which arose with the times had to be brought into line with the inherited traditional views and beliefs. As in Spain in the thirteenth century, so now the Jews either went the way of Maimonides, who resolved religious difficulties into philosophical abstractions, or the way of the Zohar, *i.e.* of the cabbalistic explanation of the traditional conceptions and texts. The printing of books was of great help to both movements. In 1551 the first printed edition of Maimonides' philosophical work appeared in Venice, and in 1558 the Zohar was printed in Mantua. The appearance of these works increased the tension between the philosophical "Enlighteners" and the cabbalistic "Mystics". Rabbi Aaron, chief Rabbi of Prague in 1550 and later of Posen, openly attacked Maimonides' attempt to rationalize the statements of the Bible. Still, seeing that Maimonides was an unimpeachable authority on questions of religious law, one could not stop the young people from being interested also in his philosophy of religion. An open quarrel broke out in Prague between these young people and the adherents of Rabbi Aaron, who were led by the latter's son-in-law, Joseph Ashkenazi. Joseph had finally to withdraw, and he devoted himself more and more to

* See p. 20 ff below.

mysticism. He accepted the post of Rabbi in Verona and in 1570 emigrated to Safed in the northern part of Eretz Israel, the focus of the new Cabbalistic movement, which regarded Isaak Lurya as its spiritual leader. Lurya regularly spent part of Friday evenings with Joseph reading from the Mishnah. Joseph was reputed to be the greatest scholar in the Mishnah, which he expounded in a peculiar ancient sing-song. He was so far affected by the humanistic tendencies of the times as to seek to establish the precise text of the Mishnah. His contemporaries called him "divine Tanna", the name by which the authorities of the Mishnah were known.

Equally devoted to the Mishnah, though in a different way, was the most commanding thinker who lived in Prague in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, and the memory of whose powers survived in legend for a long time after him: Liwa ben Bezalel, or, as he was commonly called, the Great Rabbi Loew.

II

THE REALITY AND THE SECRET OF HIS LIFE

THE magical halo which in the eyes of posterity surrounds the figure of the Great Rabbi Loew loses nothing from a closer examination of his actual life. There are few reliable sources from which one can gather the facts. In his works he generally avoided any reference to events in his own life. Some details we owe to the chronicles of his disciple, David Gans, to occasional references of his contemporaries, and to the inscription on his tombstone. In 1727 Isaiah Katz (Kohen), Rabbi of Brod in Moravia, a direct descendant of the Great Rabbi Loew, ordered the Secretary of the Prague Jewish Community, Meier Perles (or Pereles), likewise a descendant, to write the family chronicles. This *Megillath Yuchasin* was first published in 1745 by a son of Isaiah, Moses Katz, as a supplement to his work *Mate Moshe*. In view of the relationship between Perles and the subject of his chronicles, one must assume that he would not have included anything which could not be checked from reliable sources, or at least from reminiscences of the family. It is, however, remarkable that a work published one hundred and twenty years after the death of the Great Rabbi Loew makes no mention of any of the famous legends attached to his person, for instance that of the Golem.

According to family tradition, Worms was considered

the birthplace of the Great Rabbi Loew. In one of the works of his elder brother Chayim, however, it is mentioned that he, Chayim, was born in Posen, where he spent his early youth. Further, Rabbi Solomon Lurya, one of the most brilliant personalities of Polish Jewry, in one of his dissertations, speaks of his grandfather, who looked after his education, as having been related to the Great Rabbi Loew, and as having lived in his later years with the father of the Great Rabbi in the same town, Posen. It must therefore be assumed that Posen, which always had a great attraction for him, was the Great Rabbi Loew's home town.

At the same time the history of his ancestors is closely connected with Worms, although a still older trail leads to Prague. There in the preceding century had lived a respected talmudist and lover of the Cabbala, Yehudah Liwai. The inscription on his tombstone, which has been preserved, puts the year of his death as 1440 and states that he was descended from King David. It was after this Yehudah Liwai that his famous successor was named. Liwai or Liwa means "lion" (Slav: *lev*, German: *Löwe*), according to Jacob's blessing the symbol of Judah. A grandson of old Yehudah Liwai must have lived in Worms, as he was called Chayim Wirmes, *i.e.* of Worms. He had three sons, the oldest of whom, Bezalel, remained in his father's business, whilst the two younger ones went to Poland to study. One of them, Jacob, later became Rabbi of Worms, and in 1550 Ferdinand I appointed him Chief Rabbi of the whole of Germany. On account of his learning he was called "the wonder of the times". He has already been mentioned above as a member of the Commission which by order of the Emperor had to

fix the method of elections for the Jewish Community of Prague. It is interesting to note that a daughter of Chayim Wirmes was married in Poland and that her son Arye Loew became a famous Rabbi in Cracow, where the public likewise called him the Great Rabbi Loew, and made pilgrimages to his burial-place.

Bezalel tried to make good in his four sons what he had missed himself; all of them were to become learned men. He seems to have moved before his marriage to Posen, where there were many academies. We know for certain that his eldest son mentioned above, called Chayim after his grandfather, was a disciple of Schachna, who founded Polish Jewry's renown for learning, and a fellow-student of Isserles, the greatest Rabbinical authority of his age. In the preface to one of his works Chayim mentions a certain Yitzchak Sephardi, who later emigrated to Jerusalem, as the one among his teachers who gave him a thorough grounding in the Pentateuch and the commentary of Rashi. We may assume that his younger brother, Yehudah Liwa, derived from the same teacher his love for an exact knowledge of the Torah and for Rashi. It may seem strange that at a time when religious studies were so universal one had to make exceptional efforts to acquire such proficiency, but such was the fact. No wonder that both brothers stood up passionately in their writings for such studies and that both composed commentaries to Rashi, through which they first became widely known. Chayim was also aware of the importance of grammar for the correct understanding of the literature handed down from generation to generation. Nor did he neglect general knowledge; the Jew, he said, "must not seclude himself from the spirit of the

times, so as not to become for want of knowledge the laughing-stock of other nations". He speaks in his works of his grammatical studies with his friends during the years he spent in Worms. This shows that the connection of the family with that town was always kept up. Later he became Rabbi of Friedberg in Upper Hesse, where he died on the festival of Pentecost 1588.

Of the two other brothers of the Great Rabbi Loew, neither was active as an author, but both were considered authorities in religious matters. One of them, Sinai, lived in Prague not far from his brother. He was head of a talmudic school and later became Rabbi of the whole of Moravia. The other brother, Samson, remained in Poland and became Chief Rabbi of Krzemienic. Solomon Lurya, whose judgment was very strict, speaks in his *Responsa* very highly of the four sons of Bezalel. He calls Yehudah Liwa an "Ari of the Torah", an allusion to his name, as "Ari" means lion, the same as Liwa. And this at a time when no work of Rabbi Liwa had yet been published!

In Lurya's 12th Responsum, the four brothers are mentioned one after the other, apparently in order of age. It is an old custom not to place a younger brother before an older one, at least not knowingly. However, Lurya, who as a member of the family must have known the relative ages, places Yehudah Liwa in the second place after Chayim. We find the same sequence in Gans' Chronicles, which were composed in Prague with the knowledge of the Great Rabbi Loew. Gans mentions another source for his genealogical statement, namely Rabbi Sinai, whom, by the way, he calls his teacher. As these two contemporary witnesses agree with each

other, the later tradition in the family, according to which the Great Rabbi Loew was said to have been the youngest of the brothers, apparently because he survived them all by many years, must be corrected. All this is really of little importance, except that it helps us to ascertain the Great Rabbi's actual age.

The only reliable date is the one to be seen on his tombstone, namely the date of his death, the 18th Elul (5)369, corresponding to 22nd August 1609. According to the family chronicles, he is supposed to have been born in 1512, but his first biographer, Nathan Gruen (1885), puts the date ten years later. He does so because the brother Chayim, whom he considers much older, was a schoolfellow of Isserles and the latter was born about 1520. Today, however, it is generally accepted that Isserles was born about 1510; if so, the objection to 1512 as the year of Rabbi Liwa's birth falls to the ground. The fact that he was the second son makes the date given by the family tradition still more probable. In this case, however, the magnitude of the tasks undertaken by Liwa when already very old would be astonishing, for instance, that at the age of eighty-five he returned to Prague to take over the duties of Chief Rabbi, which hitherto he had declined. As a rule family chronicles do not err in stating that an ancestor lived well into the nineties, or that he did not reach his ninetieth year, especially when dealing with a person "to whom the eyes of the world were turned". From a document which has been preserved, it appears that he asked to be relieved of his post on account of age. But at that time he was physically still comparatively vigorous. Not long before, in the house of Mordecai Maisl, as has been

mentioned, he had witnessed the latter's will. Mentally too he remained in full possession of his faculties to the last. A few days before his death he wrote an approbation to *Be'er Sheba*, a work of his pupil Isachar Baer of Eulenberg. In view of all these facts we may conclude that his life extended from 1512 to 1609.

It has already been mentioned how his name was derived from an ancestor. The names Liwa or Liwai were then fairly common. For instance, his elder brother Chayim had a fellow-student at Worms who published a work on astronomy and was called Liwa Oppenheim. Rabbi Liwa himself signed his name simply as Yehudah son of Bezalel. Even when he became Chief Rabbi he insisted on being addressed by the community by this name without any title—for instance, when called to the reading of the Torah in Synagogue. The title "Rabbi" did not at that time have the same significance in public life as it has today; it corresponded more to the present-day "Mr". Even Liwa's tombstone only bears the simple form of the name, out of respect for his lifelong humility. His original books bear as full name of the author "Rabbi Yehudah Liwa (or Liwai) son of Rabbi Bezalel". This, however, does not always apply to the later reprints. Since through his writings he became a great authority, succeeding generations applied to him a code name "Maharal of Prague". This name is formed by the initial letters of "Moreinu Harav Rabbi Liwa", which means "Our teacher the master Rabbi Liwa". His popular name, "The Great (in German '*Der Hohe*') Rabbi Loew", is first found in an abridged edition of Sheloh of 1680, of which more will be said further down. The figure of a lion is engraved on his tombstone,

and even today on a house in Prague, not far from the old cemetery, the head of a lion can be seen in stone above the door. This head had been transferred from a demolished house which formerly stood on the same spot, and in which the Great Rabbi Loew is said to have lived.

Just as the whole period of his studies and development is shrouded in obscurity, there is equally no certainty as to when he first came to Prague. The first reliable date is given by a statement of Gans that in 1553 he became Rabbi of "all the Moravian communities", but whether he went there from Prague or from Poland is not clear. One must assume that Gans, who in his note mentions all the places of Liwa's activities from 1592 backwards, would not have omitted any activity of his as Rabbi before 1553. The communities of Moravia, which included such important places as Nikolsburg, Prossnitz, and Lundenberg, had only recently created the post of a district Rabbi. This post required a man who, apart from being a rabbinical authority, had to possess organizing abilities. Apparently Rabbi Liwa, who was forty when called, had up till then been a private scholar without any official appointment.

His wife, Perl, was the daughter of a certain Samuel, a wealthy man who was nicknamed "Rich Schmelkes". The only reliable date about her is to be found on the tombstone of her husband, in whose grave she was buried nine months after his death, on the 12 Iyar 5370, *i.e.* 1610. The inscription does not contain anything from which one might form a picture of her. More details, although somewhat intermixed with legends, are mentioned in Perles' family chronicles. He tells us that

he "had heard from his father" that Liwa married at the age of thirty-two in 1544, and that his wife was twenty-eight years old. The rich father-in-law had sent Liwa to study in Poland, where also a son of Samuel Joshua Schmelkes lived. In Poland, Perles says, Liwa had studied under Solomon Lurya, but this seems highly improbable. Liwa and Lurya were almost of the same age. Surely Lurya who, as has been mentioned, greatly extolled Liwa, would not have omitted to refer to himself as his teacher. In the same way Liwa, who on many fundamental points held similar views to Lurya, would certainly have acknowledged this great contemporary as his teacher.

The report in the family chronicles on the marriage of Liwa and Perl reads like a romantic love-story. After the betrothal, Perl's father had the misfortune to lose all his possessions. He notified Liwa in Posen and freed him from all obligations. But Liwa would not hear of it and would not give up his beloved. Meantime Perl supported her parents by selling bread and pastries. One day a soldier rode into the Ghetto, and as he was passing the girl he picked up a loaf with his lance and tried to make off with it. But the girl caught the horse by the bridle and demanded payment; she was poor, she pleaded, and had to support a family. The horseman replied that he was hungry and had no money on him. As the girl would not let him go, he gave her a twisted shawl as a pledge, saying that if he did not redeem it the next day, she could keep it. The soldier did not return, and when Perl opened the shawl she found therein a lot of gold pieces. This money put Schmelkes on his feet again, Liwa returned, and the wedding took place.

They had six daughters and one son, who was called Bezalel after his grandfather. The eldest daughter Leah married Yitzchak Kohen (Katz), who was renowned as a Jewish scholar. For a short time he was Rabbi in Moravia and Vienna, and afterwards probably became secretary to his father-in-law and leader of the community in Prague. Leah died childless at an early age and Yitzchak Kohen married her sister Vögele. Yitzchak came from a wealthy house. His great-grandfather Akiba had had to leave the town of Ofen, where he was persecuted on account of his wealth, and settled in Prague, where he died in 1496. He is said to have had twelve sons and thirteen daughters, the latter all but one married to men belonging to the caste of "priests" (Cohanim). When in Synagogue he with his sons and sons-in-law had to pronounce the blessing of the priests, he was proud to be able literally to fulfil the command to the priests contained in Num. vi. 23: "On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel." The Hebrew word for "on this wise" is "Koh" ("Kaph" and "Heh") and the numerical value of these two letters is twenty-five.

The thirteenth daughter of Akiba married a certain Sheftel Horowitz, and her grandson Jesaia, born about 1570 in Prague, became one of the chief authorities on the new Cabbala of Safed. His principal work *Shnei Luchoth Habrith* (The Two Tablets of the Covenant) appeared only after his death. It bears testimony to the pure, unworldly character of its author, who, from the initial letters of the title of his work, was called the "holy Sheloh". All this would be of little importance for our present purpose, were it not for the connection of Sheloh's life with the family of the Great Rabbi Loew.

Yitzchak Kohen and Vögele had a daughter Eva, who was the Great Rabbi Loew's favourite grandchild and became quite proficient in rabbinical knowledge. In 1600 she married Samuel Bachrach, who from Prague was called as Rabbi to his native town of Worms. During the persecution of the Jews in 1615 he had to flee, and shortly afterwards he died. Eva returned to Prague with her two children and devoted herself entirely to their education. This remarkable woman must have made a deep impression on "Sheloh", who asked her to marry him, but she declined. Not long after, in 1621, he resigned from the post of Chief Rabbi of Prague and emigrated to Palestine, where he became the centre of the Cabbalistic circle. He died before 1630. Meantime Eva's son developed in Prague into an eminent scholar, and in 1650 he was called to Worms to the post which his father had occupied. Eva could now consider that she had fulfilled her duties towards her offspring. It was still vouchsafed to her to witness the first rise to fame of her grandson Yair Chayim Bachrach. She then left her entire family and started for Palestine, in fulfilment of a resolution taken long before. But poor Eva did not reach her destination: she died on the way, in Sofia, in the year 1651.

Rabbi Liwa's activity in Moravia, according to definite indications given by Gans, lasted till 1573, more than twenty years. Not much is known about this period. In 1588 a former pupil, Israel, sent a letter to Liwa to Prague, which is reprinted in one of Liwa's works, *Netivoth Olam* (xiii. 9). The letter, written in high-flown verse, recalls the Great Rabbi Loew's unforgettable activity in Moravia and makes special mention of the

way in which he conducted the Talmudic College at Nikolsburg; all this was apparently in order to recall the writer to Liwa's memory. He appeals to him as an authority whose words carry weight ("the like of him we have not seen in our age") to raise his voice against a pernicious movement which had begun to spread also in Bohemia and Poland and which was called "Nadlerism". The origin of this word is obscure. "Nadler" was understood to mean a person about whose legitimate birth there was a doubt. Solomon Lurya, in the one passage in which he speaks of his relationship to the sons of old Bezalel, mentions that "Nadlerism" had even ventured to cast aspersions on their legitimacy on their mother's side. As early as 1583 Rabbi Liwa preached a sermon against "Nadlerism", which later appeared in print, in the "old-new" (Alt-Neu) Synagogue of Prague on the Sabbath before the Day of Atonement. After the sermon, in the presence of ten scholars, the slanderers were solemnly exorcized. Once again in 1588, Rabbi Liwa felt impelled to take up the request of his former pupil. He collected the opinions of other scholars, especially in Poland, about "Nadlerism", and published them along with the letter, adding his own reply, which is couched in verses similar to those of his pupil Israel. Actually he seems to have been successful in putting an end to "Nadlerism" both inside and outside Bohemia.

Another testimony to the activity of Liwa in Moravia can be found in a blessing which up to our own days was pronounced every Sabbath in the community of Kanitz for those who drank only Kasher wine and did not carry on profane conversation during the service. A note to the text of this blessing says that its author was

"our Rabbi Liwa (Loew), the Rabbi of the Country", whom it mentions as still living.

Some idea of Liwa's abilities may be formed from what we know of his organizing activity in Moravia. Up to the Second World War the community of Prossnitz (today: Prostějov) preserved a Minute Book, the oldest pages of which contain regulations about taxes and the management of Synagogues. The last line is in Rabbi Liwa's own handwriting and a formula is added testifying to the authenticity of the entry. It is true the date corresponds to the year 1587, at which time Liwa no longer officiated in Moravia, but probably older regulations were transferred into a new Minute Book, which was sent to Liwa for attestation. It is less likely that the Prossnitz community only in 1587 expressed a desire to have these regulations formulated. In any case it is certain that Liwa is the originator of those communal regulations. As will be shown further down, he was similarly active in organizing in Prague, and therefore one cannot dismiss the tradition that he was the author of communal regulations for the Jews in Moravia, especially of rules for communal and district elections and taxes. His delight in ordering the practical affairs of life had a metaphysical basis—the belief that the world is the expression of the divine will for order. The way of true conduct lies in keeping order in daily life and recognizing it in the occurrences in the world surrounding us. Sin is disorder. To put order into the world is our messianic task.

In 1572 a meeting of all the Moravian communities took place in Lundenburg (today: Břeclav) under the chairmanship of Liwa. The country at that time was going through a difficult period. The plague had broken

out and as usual there was the danger that the Jews would be blamed for this punishment of the heavens. Nothing is known about the resolutions and steps which were taken at the meeting, but it seems to have been Liwa's last public appearance in Moravia. At that time he was sixty years old, and as he was independent financially, he no doubt wished to devote himself to literary work. He was attracted by Prague, with its intellectual life, with the possibilities it offered for varied multiform activities, and with Gerson's printing works. He began his literary activities at an age when others begin to think of retiring. He came to Prague as president of the Juridical College, a post which also had to receive the sanction of the Royal Chancellery. At that time the position of Chief Rabbi was occupied by Isaac Melnik.. As has been mentioned before, in 1571 Maximilian II had visited the Ghetto of Prague, and Mordecai Maisl soon after, in memory of that event, had erected the Klaus Synagogue on his own ground. Gans in his Chronicles states that Rabbi Liwa, "who came to Prague in 1573, founded the well-known college called Klaus and taught there the Torah". One can assume that Maisl was looking for a man of eminence who would attract young people to the new Synagogue and college and that he accordingly did everything to secure Liwa. The two men remained friends until Maisl's death.

Liwa's main public activity in Prague was educational. Not often, as we have previously stated, does he mention in his works matters which affected him personally; in one of these few passages he laments the poor state of education at the time. Prague was dominated by the method of Pilpul, *i.e.* dialectical hair-splitting. Every-

one seeking public recognition sought only to shine in this juridico-logical firework display. No importance was attached to a sound knowledge of the Bible, or of the Mishnah. The following passage appears in Liwa's discourse on the Torah, towards the end of the preface: "Since I began to think independently, my aim has been to find out what is clever and what foolish in the attitude of our generation to the Torah. I did not like their attitude. . . . I took it upon myself to write to the Communities in Poland and Russia, exhorting them to put a stop to such an attitude, but I had no success." More sorrowfully he exclaims in an earlier work (*Derech Hachayim*, 6): "I do not wish to consider myself great or worthy enough to correct others or to say I am not guilty of what I condemn in others. I also began as they did and even tried to surpass them. But just for this reason I can discern my shortcomings and am specially justified in bewailing the state of affairs." The conclusion to which his own mental struggles had brought him was that his contemporaries "were more concerned with subtleties of their own judgment than with God's word, the Torah. Days are spent in useless matters, in finding pleasure in worthless complications. Would it not be better to become proficient in a regular handicraft where every refinement brings some positive result? Excessive subtlety on the other hand only leads to a confusion of truth with lies. This is what tears at my heart" (*Tifereth Yisrael*, 56).

In his fight against the Pilpul he stood very close to Solomon Lurya. But Liwa was of a much milder nature, and he tried to find kinder ways of combating the evil. He began by setting forth in his works, his theoretical

views on the reform of teaching. It should be linked with old Jewish tradition, but receive a new foundation. There is only one point in the world where divine reason touches human understanding, the Torah. "There is no approach to God except through the Torah. Only through this approach does man become God-fearing. Do not believe that he who applies Pilpul to Mishnah and Torah is a man of the Torah. He is only one proficient in Pilpul but there is nothing of the Torah in him" (*Netivoth Olam*, I, 5). From his *Discourse on the Torah* one can form a picture of the state of education at that time. The rich people kept teachers for their sons, in order to drill into their pupils as early as possible knowledge of the Talmud and Pilpul. No one cared for the education of the poor. All the moral damage of the time, Liwa says, is caused by this mode of education. He demands that from his youth onwards every Jew should become acquainted with the exact text of the whole Torah; even his favourite Commentary of Rashi he considers unsuitable for beginners. The remaining books of the Bible should then be added and after that the Mishnah. Finally, when all these have been absorbed comes the Gemara, which presents the final discussion of the laws set down in the Torah and Mishnah. There is also a deeper reason for this. There are three sides to the human intellect—wisdom, knowledge, and insight. The Torah represents pure wisdom, the Mishnah the knowledge which enables us to classify various things most exactly, and the Gemara the insight which seizes hidden connections. Only he who acquires all three faculties in the correct manner becomes perfect in truth (*Tifereth Yisrael*, ibid.).

With this educational demand was linked a social one, for providing for the education of the poor. The sons of the well-to-do gain nothing as long as "in this generation deficient in knowledge, the rich care only for their own children and everyone lives for himself alone, without tendering any help to the children of the poor". "Progress must be universal, otherwise it is of no profit even for the small favoured part of the community." "The Torah is the betrothed of all Israel" (*Discourse on the Torah*, ibid.).

He tried to fix in the minds of the young people the exact meaning of the Biblical text by making them intimately acquainted with Hebrew grammar. An incident in 1597 testifies to the care he bestowed on this mode of teaching. Joseph Heilperin, a teacher in Posen, published a Hebrew grammar, *Em Hayeled*, for children of early school age. In the preface to this book, which has been reprinted many times, he mentions that "the doyen of the scholars, the great Gaon Loew of Prague" had urged him to compose it, because he himself had been convinced through visiting the children at school of the value of this mode of teaching. The preface is followed by an appreciation by Rabbi Liwa in a characteristic single sentence: it was a religious duty to teach one's child the holy language and the grammar, as our forefathers did. As the first edition of the grammar appeared in Prague in the year when Liwa returned to that town from Posen, one can assume that he helped to publish it. A second edition appeared a year later in Cracow.

Liwa took an active part in the education of adults, placing the neglected study of the Mishnah on a broad popular basis. In his college at the Klaus Synagogue he

instituted regular courses, where a chapter of the Mishnah was dealt with daily in systematic sequence. These courses were highly praised and imitated not only in Prague but everywhere in the Jewish world. In the epilogue to one of his works, *Amudei Shesh*, Ephraim Luntschitz, Liwa's successor as Chief Rabbi of Prague, a famous author and brilliant Hebrew stylist, speaks of the visible gain which resulted everywhere from the study of the Mishnah as "introduced here in Prague by the Gaon Rabbi Loew". Amongst the younger disciples of Liwa there was one who was so strongly impressed by the teaching method of his master that he resolved to write down, in the latter's style, explanations to the text of the whole of the Mishnah. This was Yomtov Lipman Heller, whose commentary *Tossaphoth Yomtov* became so popular that up to the present day it is attached to every edition of the Mishnah. From that time everyone has been able to follow in the footsteps of Rabbi Liwa. The study of the Mishnah was raised to a new and higher plane.

Prague afforded scope also for Liwa's talent in juridical organization. Not long before his arrival from Moravia a charitable brotherhood had been formed, chiefly for the burial of the dead: "Chevrah Kadishah Gemiluth Chasadim". Rabbi Liwa was instructed to work out the first statutes for such a corporation. The difficulty was to bring the fairly extensive autonomy of the brotherhood into line with the communal administration from a juridical and religious point of view. The basis of these statutes has been accepted by many similar brotherhoods of the present day. As a token of gratitude, at the annual meeting of the brotherhood on the day before the new

moon of Shevat a speech is delivered based on a passage from Liwa's *Derech Hachayim*.

But the true greatness of Rabbi Liwa, who lived in a spiritual world without losing sight of the realities of life, developed in quite a different direction. He had by nature a great gift for story-telling, for flights of imagination. Since olden times two forces can be distinguished in the spiritual development of Judaism. The one affects the laws of religious and social life, the obligations arising out of tradition, the prescribed but constantly changing mode of life—this is the force of the "Halachah". The other force stirs the fantasy, creates typical pictures of human situations, clothes with life the abstractions of thought—this is the force of the "Aggadah". The Halachist is essentially a scholar, the Aggadist essentially an artist. The former extracts from the Aggadah its logical intellectual kernel hidden in its stories—fantasies, as one tries to elucidate the ideas of a certain period from its artistic productions. The Aggadist becomes creative when brought into contact with reality, which includes everything that the Halachah can proffer. Rabbi Liwa's nature inclined to the Aggadah, the artistic, but at the same time he was also bound closely to the Halachah, his command of which won him high esteem. The inscription on the north panel of his tombstone mentions his annotations to the Talmud, which primarily concerned questions of Halachah. Perles mentions in his family chronicles that his father possessed an edition of the Talmud printed in Venice in 1520, which contained notes of Rabbi Liwa entered by his son-in-law Yitzchak Kohen. During the great fire in the Prague Ghetto in 1689, however, everything is said to have

been lost except two tractates, Succah and Erubin, which were still in the keeping of Perles' brother. Up till today these volumes have not been found anywhere. No doubt in that fire other, unpublished works of Rabbi Liwa also perished, as well as his many decisions on questions of Halachah about which he was consulted, and which are likewise mentioned on the tombstone.

One of these decisions in religio-juridical questions has been preserved. It is in the form of a pamphlet entitled "Decision concerning an Agunah". It is still today considered one of the main sources for dealing with this painful social question. The circumstances were as follows: In 1583 a Jew was murdered in Poland by robbers and the body disappeared; no witnesses could be found. The wife of the murdered man therefore became an "Agunah", *i.e.* a woman whose widowhood could not be proved. When the woman wanted to marry again, it had first to be ascertained if from an ecclesiastical point of view she could be considered a widow. Rabbi Liwa, who came to Posen a few months later, was approached on this question, and he mentions that he studied there all the documents. His decision was to the effect that the woman could not be considered a widow and could not marry again. A few years later Jacob Polak, a disciple of Rabbi Liwa in Posen, raised the question again, no doubt because it had again become acute for the woman. Seeing that the husband of the "Agunah" had not been discovered after nearly ten years, Polak regarded the matter in a different light. He expressed a much milder opinion than Rabbi Liwa and sent it to his teacher "the Chief Rabbi of Prague". The latter there-

upon, in 1597, published in Prague his own opinion, together with that of Polak. Liwa's standpoint remained negative as before; the whole of juridical literature, as handed down, compelled him to this view. He showed, by placing Polak's opinion next to his own, how much he would have liked to take up a less strict attitude. No arguments should remain unheard, but the law stands above man and demands an impartial application.

Questions of Halachah, about customs of the Festival of the Passover, are also dealt with in other works of his, especially in the one entitled *Gevurath Adonai* (The Power of God). Still, it was that part of his nature which inclined to the Aggadah which made him an outstanding personality of his time. It has already been mentioned that in that century it was the legal parts of Talmudic literature which were most ardently studied, and it was the ambition of most students to be considered a master of the Halachah. The legends and tales of the Aggadah were chiefly welcomed by the popular preacher, the "Darshan", as illustrations to his homilies. In the last quarter of the century the Aggadah however regained the position due to it by right.

The expectation that the Messiah would soon come was continually growing stronger among the Jews of that time. This again renewed interest in the Cabbalah and with it the taste for legends and fantasies interspersed among utterances of supra-rational thought—a continuation of the tradition of the Aggadah. Rabbi Liwa chose a more direct way of returning to the Aggadah. For him the tales of the Aggadah meant an indirect revelation of the meaning of worldly events. He regarded the ancient creators of the Aggadah as men full of the spirit of God,

like the prophets. The religious value of the Aggadah should be considered even higher than that of the Halachah, because the latter only appeals to our will, but the former to the whole of man.

This strong desire to *understand* links Rabbi Liwa with the Renaissance. By striving to explain human existence from the standpoint of feeling, he anticipates the highest ideals of the Baroque. This explains why the more rationalistic thinkers reckoned him among the greatest of their period, while the later adherents of the Cabbala, especially the Chassidim, cherished his writings as a sacred legacy down to modern times. In 1859 when Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, the famous scholar of Thorn and a religious precursor of Herzl, was asked for an introduction to a new edition of one of Liwa's works (*Or Chadash*), he wrote: "Would I not consider myself ridiculous if from my humble position I were to aspire to the flight of the great eagle in order to testify to the worth of his achievements? Everyone knows how deep are his sacred writings, which everyone understands according to his intellect." A characteristic story is told of the Chassid Menachem of Kozk, who died in 1859. He heard the Rabbi of Gostnin complaining in a room next to his own that the Maharal of Prague often repeated himself in his writings. He opened the door and said: "We take great pains to understand every word of the Maharal, and for you it is too much if he repeats his words!"

Nevertheless it is remarkable how much Rabbi Liwa repeats himself in one and the same chapter of a work. He does this, however, in such an elegant way and with such evident intention that the reader feels as if he talks to him and expects him to listen carefully and follow his

words. Thus his works are not cast in the stiff form of dissertations where the author, so to say, shuts himself up in himself and cares only for the logical connection of his thoughts. Liwa, on the other hand, always remains even in his most comprehensive works the narrator, the expounder, the "Darshan".

Of his orations five have been preserved, but they too do not differ in form and style from his other works. It is not likely that these orations were delivered in the form in which we know them, because they would have lasted far too long. Probably these orations which were originally delivered in Yiddish were afterwards enlarged for the printed edition in Hebrew. In the spring of 1583, Isaac Melnik, Chief Rabbi of Prague, died and Liwa was asked to preach on the Sabbath of Repentance, the Sabbath before the Day of Atonement. This sermon, according to tradition, was always delivered in the main Synagogue of the community, the "old-new" (Alt-Neu) Synagogue, by the Chief Rabbi of the time. Again in 1589, when the post of Chief Rabbi was vacant, he gave a sermon on the "Great Sabbath", the one before Passover. This sermon appeared in the same year in print under the title *Drush Naë u'Meshubach*, which literally means a fine and admirable sermon. When Liwa was in Posen in 1592 he preached there on both days of Pentecost. In the "Sermon on the Torah" he expounded his pedagogic views. In the "Sermon on the Commandments", he contrasted the wisdom of speculation, the goal of which is knowledge, with the wisdom of the commandments, the goal of which is action. In the spring of 1597, when he had finally returned to Prague, he delivered a sermon in memory of a distinguished

Prague scholar, Akiba Günzburg Frankfurter, in which he represented life according to the commandments broadly as life in eternity, without much reference to the deceased. Most of his works, even the more important ones, are written in a similar style. He addresses the listener, not the reader. There is no central idea from which everything radiates; there are only individual observations held together by some external bond, for instance, a festival. His personal view of the world seems to have developed slowly, because only in his later years did he start writing, though he then produced works in great number. He poured out his thoughts and interpretations like an orator who delivers his speech on the impulse of the moment without a preconceived plan. There are many indications that he actually dictated his books in the same way as he would deliver a speech. There is the characteristic variation of a thought and the repetition of quotations, as if to remind the listener of something that had been mentioned not long ago. There are chapters which begin: "The words of Rabbi Liwa, the son of Bezalel" (for instance, *Gevurath Adonai*, ch. 66). Apparently these are chapters which were inserted later on in the completed manuscript, and to which was added the attesting introductory formula, because they were not autographs. Somehow or other the formula got into print, but those chapters do not differ from any of the others. There is also the evidence of Perles, that Liwa's son-in-law, Yitzchak Kohen, edited the judicial decisions of his father-in-law and that he also entered the latter's notes to the Talmud in his own copy. These entries were certainly not simply copied out, but were dictated during their collaboration. Kohen also

added his own explanations, which he would not have done if he had merely copied the original text of his father-in-law. Yitzchak Kohen acted no doubt as Liwa's secretary and wrote down most of Liwa's works. He also planned his father-in-law's working time and his intellectual pursuits.

The oldest of Rabbi Liwa's works which has been preserved belongs to a category different from all the other works. It is a very extensive commentary on Rashi's annotations to the Pentateuch. It bears the title *Gur Arye* (A Lion's Whelp). The old scholars liked to give to their works a title composed of a group of Biblical words with allusion to the author's name. "Gur Arye" are the Hebrew words in Gen. xlix. 9, the blessing of Jacob: "(Judah is) a lion's whelp." This work was printed by the Gersons in Prague in 1578 and soon became popular. It was repeatedly reprinted, and in later editions of Liwa's works he was referred to as the author of *Gur Arye*. Liwa himself often refers to this work. In it he already deals with the Aggadah in a manner which he greatly developed in his later works. When in 1582 the second work *Gevurath Adonai* (The Power of God) made its appearance, he had two other large works already completed, namely *Derech Hachayim* (The Way of Life) and *Be'er Hagolah* (The Well of the Exile). He mentions these, in the 23rd, 38th, and 67th chapters of *Gevurath Adonai*. *Derech Hachayim* appeared only in 1589 and *Be'er Hagolah* was set up in print as late as 1600. Many of his works were thus lying ready for the press for a number of years, even decades, before being set up in print, and it therefore appears that he was most prolific at a very advanced age. Most of his

works were published by the Gersons of Prague, but other printers also took an interest in his work. The second work mentioned above, *Gevurath Adonai*, was published in Cracow and his other work, *Tiphereth Yisrael* (The Splendour of Israel) in Venice in 1599. It is strange to note that the Cracow publication is the only one not mentioning the author's name on the title-page. Liwa, however, in later works continually refers to this one as his own, and, as has been seen, also mentions works of his which had not yet been published. At that time the printer was also the publisher, at least he was commissioned to publish. It can scarcely be supposed that he would have left out the name of the author of *Gur Arye* on the title-page on his own initiative. It is much more likely that this was done by the express wish of the author. The latter considered the work as only one—and not the first—of a cycle, which had to be placed in proper order before he could put his name to it.

Towards the end of the preface he mentions a great plan which he had conceived: his whole view of the world was to be presented in conjunction with the Jewish Festivals. He had in mind six parts to be entitled according to a well-known verse from I Chron. xxix. 11, which appears in the prayer-book for Sabbaths and Festivals: "Thine, O Lord is the greatness and the power, and the glory, and the eternity, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine." The whole series was to bear the title which he had provisionally given to the second book. The individual parts of the series were to be as follows:

(1) Sepher Hagdulah (Book of the Greatness) about the Sabbath;

(2) Sepher Hagvurah (Book of the Power) about Passover;

(3) Sepher Tiphereth (Book of the Glory) about the revelation at Pentecost;

(4) Sepher Netzach (Book of Eternity) about the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temple and the Messianic belief;

(5) Sepher Hahod (Book of the Majesty) about the Feast of Tabernacles;

(6) Sepher Shamayim Va-aretz (Book of the Heavens and the Earth) about the New Year and the Day of Atonement.

Liwa started with the second part, a proceeding which he justified by pointing out that the exodus was the precursor of the Sabbath. Somewhat illogically, possibly by request of the printer, he adds after chapter 47, which a thrice repeated Amen seems to mark as the original termination of the book, several chapters dealing with precepts for Passover and explanations of the Haggadah.

We do not know if it was vouchsafed to him to finish all the six books he planned. From a note in the seventy-second chapter of the second book it would seem that when this appeared, the book *Netzach* was not yet finished. In all only three of the books of the series were passed on to the printers, with slightly altered titles, viz., in addition to *Gevurath Adonai* in 1582, *Tipheret Yisrael* in 1599 and *Netzach Yisrael* in 1600. It is possible that the other three books of the series were also fully or partly in existence in manuscript, but were destroyed during the fire of 1689.

Amongst the books related to festivals there is one, not forming part of the series, namely *Or Chadash* (The

New Light) about the Festival of Purim and attached thereto a discourse about the festival of Chanukah, "Ner Mitzvah" (The Light of Duty). This was printed in 1600, the last year in which any books by Liwa appeared.

Three other works of Liwa are of a somewhat different nature, although they also reflect his leaning towards the Aggadah. One of them, *Derech Eretz* (The Way of Life) appeared in 1589, long after it had been written. It is a practical treatise on ethics, which often refers to the tractate of the Mishnah "Ethics of the Fathers", giving glimpses of their metaphysical basis.

The second book, *Netivoth Olam* (The Paths of the World), appeared in 1595. It is also in a way about ethics, and more systematic than the former. In Greek philosophy it is ethics which deals with moral conduct, its roots and aims, but for Liwa the final authority on all these matters is the Torah. His book simply shows how to obtain an understanding of moral requirements, and with it an incentive to fulfil them. The chapters are entitled "paths", such as path of the Torah, of the Law, of truth, of humility, of neighbourly love, of language, of suffering, of good will, of confidence, of generosity, etc. It is, however, not a mere compilation of rabbinical precepts for a moral life, but an attempt to co-ordinate ethical norms with the meaning of actual existence. His religious reasoning often leads to similar conclusions with the systematic reasoning of later philosophers. For instance, Kant in considering man's relationship to his fellow creatures points out that the whole of mankind must be respected in man. Liwa explains as follows the saying of the Wise that he who publicly offends his

fellow creature forgoes eternal life: an offence in public is the desecration of a man created like all men in the image of God. Therefore it is an insult to man as such, and therefore the desecration of all mankind—an immeasurable sin (*Netivoth Olam*, xii).

Liwa rejected philosophy in so far as it imagines that it can reach the truth or even examine the fundamental principles solely through the human intellect. In this respect he resembled Solomon Lurya. Despite his reverence for Maimonides the teacher of the Law, whenever he quotes him one can feel how he tries to present Maimonides' philosophical arguments as unnecessary or forced. On the other hand he felt more akin to Nachmanides' antirational attitude. From indirect sources he had certainly acquired some knowledge of general science, some geometry and astronomy. But he felt that in the opposition which was arising on all sides against an uncritical acceptance of tradition, there was an intellectual danger which he was called upon to combat. This led to the third book in this series, *Be'er Hagolah* (The Well of the Exile), the most curious and characteristic of the three. It appeared as late as 1600. He "bores" seven objections, corresponding to the seven wells of Isaac, against the teachings of the wise in our days of the diaspora, digging down till he reaches the water with which to wash them away. A chapter is devoted to each objection and its refutation. Amongst these objections are the following: the Sages deprive the Biblical texts of their simple meaning and replace it by incredible interpretations; the Talmud makes matters which are unnecessary and impossible appear as real and necessary; the Sages were as yet far from the knowledge which resulted

later on from general science, especially from astronomy and physics. The next chapter will deal in detail with the contents and method of his replies. Meanwhile, in giving here a sketch of his life and work, it is sufficient to point out that anyone who dared in the sixteenth century to approach these questions must have had a great struggle with himself.

From 1573, Liwa taught in the "Klaus" College in Prague. At that time none surpassed him in scholarship, and the publication of his first works also established his literary fame. Economically he was independent. No doubt there were many in Prague who envied him, found fault with him, and caused him much annoyance. Years later Samuel Bacharach, husband of Liwa's granddaughter Eva, asked plaintively in his *Responsa* how ill-will, even slander, could make its appearance against Rabbi Liwa, when his pure piety was known to the whole world. All this may have caused Liwa to have declined the post of Chief Rabbi after the death of Isaac Melnik in 1583. It is true he took the latter's place, as has been mentioned, on the Sabbath of Repentance, but a year later Isaac Chayot was elected Chief Rabbi. He was a supporter of the "Pilpul", as shown in his book *Pnei Yitzchak*. It may be that a contested election took place and that the "Pilpul" party obtained the majority. This seems unlikely in view of the unquestioned superiority which Liwa enjoyed as an authority, his whole later attitude towards the community, to whom he bore no ill will, and still more of his personal relationship to Chayot. The latter, a native of Prague, was the stepbrother of Liwa's wife, Perl. Everything that we know of all the branches of Liwa's family and of his wife proves

that they all lived in complete harmony. An example of this has been preserved in Bacharach's *Responsa*. He relates how in 1600 Chayot's son, Menachem, Rabbi of Wilna, came to Prague to the wedding of Liwa's granddaughter Eva, despite the hardships of the long journey. Chayot himself seems to have been an unambitious man who loved peace. After less than four years, as he relates himself, he left Prague owing to quarrels in the community. He retired to Prossnitz in Moravia and died there.

It is curious, however, that during Chayot's period of office in Prague, from 1584 to 1588, Liwa did not reside there. David Gans states definitely that for eleven years, from 1573 to 1584, Liwa was in charge of the college connected with the Klaus Synagogue, and also for a further four years prior to his call to Posen, *i.e.* from 1588 to 1592. Where Liwa was active from 1584 to 1588 Gans does not mention, but he goes on to say that Liwa went to Posen in 1592 to become "for the second time Chief Rabbi of the whole of Greater Poland". One might assume that during the years 1584 to 1588 Liwa resided in Posen for the first time. There is also a passage in the documents referring to the matter of the "Agunah"—mentioned above—which speaks of "here in Posen". But he certainly was not Chief Rabbi of Posen in those days. This would not have been suppressed in the last line of the Minute Book of Prossnitz mentioned above. (From 1527 the Chief Rabbi of Posen for the time being was also the Chief Rabbi of Greater Poland.) The remark of Gans must therefore be taken as meaning that Liwa came for the second time to Posen, this time as Chief Rabbi.

What may have induced Liwa to leave Prague in 1584 is as uncertain as what made him return there in 1588. Since these four years were those in which Chayot held office, one might assume that Liwa did not want to cause trouble to his brother-in-law, who held quite different views. That he had no ill-feeling towards the community is shown by his readiness in the spring of 1588 to preach the sermon on the Sabbath before Passover, which was always the prerogative of the Chief Rabbi. This time also he did not come to Prague as Chief Rabbi, but again took over the management of his college at the Klaus Synagogue, and devoted himself to his literary activity. This continued until the Passover of 1592.

A few weeks earlier there took place Liwa's memorable audience with the Emperor Rudolf II, which was regarded by the whole of Jewry as an extraordinary event and later gave birth to a number of legends. Writing with this event fresh in his mind, Gans says in his chronicles: "Our sovereign, the just, gracious and high Emperor Rudolphus, called the Gaon Liwa, the son of Bezalel, to come before him, received him most kindly and conversed with him as with a friend. The subject of the conversation, however, is quite unknown. This happened here in Prague on 3 Adar 5352 (1592)." By a mere chance a few decades ago a more detailed and quite reliable account of the audience came to light. It originates from Liwa's son-in-law, Yitzchak Kohen, who entered the particulars of their reception in his Venetian Bible. Kohen was a witness of the audience and his entry reads as follows: "Today, Sunday 10 Adar 5352 (*i.e.* 23rd February 1592—Gans' date is a mistake of a week), Prince Bertier delivered to Mordecai Maisl and

Isaac Weisl, the son of Chanoch, the Emperor's
requesting the Gaon Rabbi Loew to call at the
apartment in the Castle. Rabbi Loew did so
with him his brother Gaon Rabbi Sinai a
We went there on foot accompanied by Isaac
soon as we arrived, a footman of Prince Bertier
for us the door into an antechamber. This antec
led into another room and we proceeded from
room. Our Sovereign the Emperor had another
getting there from his apartments. Prince Berti
out of an inner room, bowed to the three of
politely shook hands. He then led us to a furth
and kindly asked us to sit down on chairs which
prepared for the occasion. He insisted on our
our heads covered. He stood before us and exc
few polite words with us. He then went to an ad
room, where he ordered the servant to arrange
of honour and next to it a somewhat lower seat.
returned to us and took my father-in-law by the
in order to lead him into the inner room. Rabb
and I wanted to retire, but the Prince with
politeness asked us to stay. He took my father
into the inner room and made him sit down on
of honour, whilst he himself occupied the low
He began to converse with him about mystical
and he spoke so loud that the two of us could h
word of the questions and answers. This was
intended by the Prince so that our Sc
Emperor, who was standing behind a curtain in
of my father-in-law, could hear everything. All a
there was silence. One could hear the noise mus
the scraping of the chairs, when our S

Emperor lifted the curtain, advanced in all his majesty and exchanged a few words with my father-in-law about the previously mentioned matters. He then retired again. All this took place at a distance of 6 to 8 ells from us. My father-in-law and the Prince continued their conversation for a short time. The Prince then led my father-in-law back to us, shook his hand and bowed deeply before him. He also very politely shook our hands with a bow and dismissed us. He accompanied us to the courtyard. As to the subject of the conversation, it is only correct, in matters affecting the Sovereign, to be silent about it. But if God grants us life we shall disclose the subject, when the time is ripe. I have recorded everything only quite shortly, also the politeness shown to us by the Prince." The next day Yitzchak Kohen added the following: "Today, Monday 11 Adar of the same year, the Prince mentioned above informed Isaac (Weisl) how the audience of my father-in-law with the Emperor had proceeded and that he had found favour with the Emperor and himself." Kohen ends with a blessing for the Emperor and confirms his report with his signature.

The report with all its vivid details makes it clear that the conversation dealt with mystical questions. The manner in which the invitation was conveyed to Liwa, the reception by Prince Bertier, the respect shown to the religious custom of keeping the head covered, the seat of honour, the polite accompaniment to the courtyard, the thanks to the head of the community the next day—all this shows that the Emperor wanted to have a private talk with the greatest scholar of his domains about questions which occupied his mind. One cannot be surprised that this audience greatly stirred the mind and the

imagination of the Jews. For them the Sovereign was not only the personification of unlimited power, on which their very life depended, but according to their religious conception he embodied something holy, assigned to him directly from God, no matter whether he was a cruel or a gracious ruler. Suddenly a member of the despised and persecuted Jewish people, considered as being outside the pale of the ordinary law, is granted the privilege of talking to a great sovereign of the time, not as a financial adviser, not as a political go-between, not as a physician, but as a Jew and "as a friend".

At the time of the audience Liwa must already have accepted the call as Chief Rabbi of Posen. Less than two months later he removed to his new centre of activity. On the two days of Pentecost he preached the regular sermons on the Torah and the Commandments which appeared in print a year later. He was then eighty years old and no doubt a man of powerful appearance. But the work involved in the post of Rabbi of the whole country placed a great strain on the occupant. What could have induced Liwa to take this work upon himself and leave Prague at such an advanced age? Isserles and Lurya were no longer alive at that time. The only Rabbi who approached Liwa in authority in Central Europe was Mordecai Jafo, a native of Prague, much younger than Liwa. He was the author of *Levush* (The King's Garment), a standard work of rabbinical literature, and the organizer of Polish Jewry. It is worthy of note that a few days after Liwa's departure from Prague, Jafo came there direct from Poland, where, as Gans puts it, he was "the most important amongst the heads of the Talmudic Colleges", and that as Liwa's successor he

went to Posen in the same year in which Liwa returned to Prague. In the introduction to his grammar, *Em Hayeled*, published in 1597, Heilperin mentions Gaon Liwa "of Prague" and Chief Rabbi Mordecai Jafo "of Posen". Though we have no definite proof it may be suggested that there was some sort of exchange of scholars, to give an impetus to new ideas. If that was the case, however, the return to Prague must already have been planned by Liwa. He must have gone back there as Chief Rabbi in the spring of 1597, because a month after Passover he preached the "In Memoriam" for Akiba Günzburg Frankfurter. This date agrees with the inscription on the south panel of the tombstone, which states that for ten years Liwa stood at the head of all the Rabbis of Bohemia and Prague. In Prague the Chief Rabbi was also acknowledged by the Government officials as head of the Jews of the whole country.

Up to the year 1600 Rabbi Liwa continued his activities unabated. He still lectured on the Mishnah at the Klaus College, as we see from the fact that Lipman Heller, who in 1597, at the age of eighteen, was already a member of the Rabbinical College, attended his courses. Five of Liwa's great works were published then. They had been ready for print for a long time, but had to be revised and re-edited before publication. The smaller works, *About an Agunah* and the funeral sermon for Frankfurter, were new. He must have had a large number of pupils. Thirty of them were honoured in death by being buried close to their teacher. He, in his modest way, never considered himself worthy to confer on anyone the title of "Moreinu", *i.e.*, our Teacher or Master. But there are many examples showing how he furthered the intel-

lectual achievements of his pupils, right down to the last days of his life.

Unfortunately he had to spend much time in Prague in settling disputes. In a letter to Joel Serkes, one of the younger great Rabbis of Poland, he regrets his delay in replying, owing to communal disputes. Serkes published this letter shortly after Liwa's death, in his collection of opinions, *Bayith Chadash*. The family chronicles of Perles mention a case of personal opposition which Liwa had to encounter. Liwa wanted his only son Bezalel, who was generally considered a "Chariff", *i.e.* very sharp, to deputize for him, in order to become one day his successor. The community, however, was against this. Greatly embittered, Bezalel left Prague and, in the Bohemian community of Kolin, founded his own Talmudic college. Shortly after, in 1600, he died. This was the heaviest blow which Liwa and his wife suffered in their long lives. Amongst the sons of Bezalel there was one, Samuel, the oldest, much beloved by Liwa. Samuel afterwards became head of the Prague community and died in 1655, at a ripe age. His small tombstone, next to the grave of his grandparents, gave rise to one of the oldest legends connected with the Great Rabbi Liwa.

Seeing that his son was not to be his deputy, Rabbi Liwa does not seem to have admitted anyone else as such. But in 1604 his advanced age urgently required some relief. In accordance with his special wish, the community applied to the Royal Chamber for a deputy, and proposed the eminent scholar Ephraim Luntschitz, who considered himself a disciple of Liwa in his opposition to the Pilpul and in his educational methods. Luntschitz originated from Poland. He was famous for

his brilliant works and became a worthy successor of Liwa.

On 22nd August (18 Elul) 1609, at the age of ninety-seven, Liwa, whose mind remained active right to the end, died. Nine months later his wife, Perl, followed him. Their graves were covered by a joint stone baldachin.

In the course of time the tombstone sank more and more into the ground, and fell into ruin. As can be read on the top of the southern panel of the tombstone, it was restored in 1724, thanks to contributions of descendants and admirers. This happened just at a time when Liwa's descendants felt a desire to collect reminiscences of the family and to fix the actual line of descent. The strong cabbalistic movement then prevailing, combined with the fascination exercised by Jonathan Ebeyschütz on the youth of Prague, brought to the fore once again the memory of the great master of the Aggadah. Pilgrims visited his grave, which was now put into a proper condition, and gradually he became the central figure of a whole series of legends.

III

LIWA'S IDEA OF MAN AND UNIVERSE

THE centre of Liwa's thinking is the order of the world, not only of that part of it which is disclosed to us but also of that part which is hidden. "Order of the world" to the scientist of today means either laws of nature, or moral precepts governing social life. To Liwa it meant a plan beyond our comprehension, inherent in all happenings and all mutual relationships. It is different from any "laws" which we might discover. The order of the world connects every part with the whole, of which only a section is accessible to us. There is nothing isolated, everything has its significance, including what one thinks and even what one omits.

Man possesses in the Torah the true plan of the order of the world. It has been transmitted to us by the Planner of the Universe in a language which man can understand, in the form of an historical report or collection of laws. It is God's own charter of the world's constitution, forming the basis of the Universe. "The words of the Torah," says Liwa, "uphold and support the world. Primarily the Torah teaches order and tells man how to arrange his conduct. But just as the Torah spells order for man, so also it constitutes the order of the Universe. For man the order of conduct is prescribed most minutely in the Torah, as otherwise he could not observe it. The order of the whole world is likewise contained in the Torah, which is nothing else than the

order of cosmic existence. This is the meaning of the sentence in the Midrash: 'He looked into the Torah and created His own world'" (*Netivoth Olam* I, 1). Elsewhere Liwa expresses the same thought more succinctly by applying an Aristotelian idea which was more familiar to the Jews of the Middle Ages: "The Torah is the form of the world" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 25) *i.e.* it is the idea round which the world assumes a shape. The text of the Torah, through its unique combination of letters and words, conveys to man everything he needs to know in order to find his way both in thought and action through the perplexities of life, without being obsessed by the fear of getting lost in the Universe. At the same time every particle of the text is of a cosmic significance which man can only surmise with awe. Liwa expresses this as follows: "Even where the laws of the Torah refer to something materialistic, they contain an inner secret, high above this world." And further: "The whole supramundane content of the Torah is enclosed in material shapes, and when man touches the material part he is drawn towards the hidden one" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 13).

Therefore one might distinguish between two sides of the Torah: the one turned towards "this world" and the other towards the "superworld". The first side deals with the material world, which is timebound and can be perceived by the senses. The second contains the unchangeable, the incomprehensible. He who only sees this world in the Torah without at the same time being carried away by the awe of the beyond in the Torah, can certainly admire it, but it is like "admiring a tree without roots, which cannot bear fruit" (ibid., preface).

The relation between the two sides of the Torah is much closer than a mere juxtaposition. Liwa emphasizes that, since the Torah testifies to the order of the world, its revelation is an integral part of that order. Man must feel the call of the beyond. In his love for the revealed God he must, through the Torah, combine both worlds. "The Torah lifts man above nature and shows him the direct supernatural way to God" (ibid., 14). Liwa is continually finding new indications in the Scriptures of the lovable relations which the Torah creates between the two worlds. He connects the verse "in her tongue is the teaching of grace" (Prov. xxxi, 26) with the saying in the Midrash which speaks of "a white and black fire around the divine throne". He interprets the white fire as something that cannot be perceived by the human eye, the absolutely pure and mysterious good, and the black fire as something that breaks off from the other, that can therefore be grasped through the human senses, as rational truth. The world exists only through God's own blessing, but some of the truth can be revealed to man. Thus the Torah combines teaching and grace (ibid., 20). In another place (ibid., 4), he states that the material world around us is "like a curtain" which hides from us the eternal. Only by studying the Torah is the curtain lifted and one approaches nearer to the world of the "other side" —to God.

Liwa's belief that a verse could at one and the same time refer to two different worlds leads him to a peculiar trend of thought and to surprising results. He cites from the Ethics of the Fathers the words of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi in explanation of the verse "The writing was the

writing of God, graven upon the tables" (Exod. xxxii, 16): "Do not read 'Charuth'—graven—but 'Cheruth' —freedom; free is only he who studies the Torah." This fine transliteration of "Charuth" (a word which occurs only here in the Bible) in an ethical sense is used by Liwa to illustrate his idea of the two worlds which appear side by side in the text of the Torah. In appearance, he says, the ideas "graven" and "freedom" have nothing in common. Actually the thought which is "graven" in the written word is free. Only the material itself in which the thought appears as writing belongs to the world, in which there is no freedom. Looked at from our materialistic world the words of the Torah are "graven", from the spiritual they are "free". This applies particularly to the words of the first tablets written by God himself. These words were so far away from everything materialistic that even the engraving was of an ideally perfect form and entirely free from any additional material. This also explains the inner sense of the Midrash that the writing on the tablets could be read from both sides; it was divine, unmaterialistic, and appeared to man only in a form which he could read in his own way (*Derech Hachayim*, part 6).

There is nothing surprising in our inability to picture to ourselves the results towards which our processes of thought are leading us; this applies even today in the sphere of physics. Liwa does not want us to consider something as a miracle because it is beyond our comprehension. Events in the spiritual world have nothing corresponding to them in the perceptible world. He positively rejects what generally is called a miracle, the sudden change of the natural course of events. "There

are no miracles", he says, "in the order of nature, and this order is fixed" (*Gevurath Adonai*, introduction). Religious doubt, indeed denial of God himself, is mostly caused by people being unable to believe in the traditional miracles. The way by which Liwa arrives at an answer is however very different from that of the Jewish philosophers of 300 years before him. The latter tried to find rational grounds for not doing violence either to belief or to natural science. Still less was it the way of the philosophers 300 years after him, who tried to give miracles a symbolical sense or to trace them to previously unknown forces of nature. Liwa believed that there is an unmaterial, timeless world above our material limited one, with its own laws, being likewise a planned creation of God. Miracles are not events which can be measured in our materialistic world, but are flashes from an abstract sphere with different dimensions.

Maimonides, in speaking of the first plague of the Egyptians, says (*Moreh* II, 29) that from the very creation of the world God endowed water with the faculty of changing into blood at certain times. Therefore the miracle does not mean a change in the laws of nature. Modern critics seek to explain the work of the magicians by the clever handling of certain infusoria. Liwa, however, is of the opinion that water could never change into blood, because it is contrary to the order of nature; we have here rather an event of the abstract world, which broke into the real world and appeared to the senses as a transformation. The actuality of the event lies in the spiritual world and the question of terrestial transformation of one substance into another does not arise. True, the enigma of the irruption of the spiritual world into

ours is not less great than the miracle itself, but this characteristic example shows that Liwa saw an essentially cosmic significance in all the events recorded by religious tradition; he considered this record as relating to the uncorporeal world above ours with its quite different order.

Even to the language of the Torah Liwa ascribes the character of a dual world. In *Derech Hachayim*, in the part relating to the fifth chapter of the Ethics of the Fathers, he says: "The language of the Torah is meant for this world and from here it appears as Hebrew . . . but looked at from the other world it is Aramaic." When the Torah refers to the materialistic world, in which there are tribes and races, it speaks the language of the people to whom it was first proclaimed. To the abstract, unmaterialistic, spiritual world not divided into nations, the Torah speaks Aramaic. As we see from the Talmud, even in Palestine discussions which had as their subject purely intellectual abstract matters, not bound to time, were carried on in Aramaic. This was a universal language, not one of a particular nation. This historical conception of Liwa's is no doubt untenable, but it does prove his incorruptible love of what he regarded as true. For nothing in this world was to Liwa so holy as Israel "for whom the world was created", or as the Hebrew language, "in which the world was created". But our life is touched by something higher than the worldly, material or national. Whoever follows the Torah, dwells on things of earthly life, but also lives in a higher world.

The events related in the Torah seem to take place entirely in our material world, subject to time. But they

also represent something which our senses cannot perceive, which we can only surmise, linking the transitory with the eternal. Joseph, the son of Jacob, was a man of flesh and blood. His early inclination towards the supernatural detached him from his brethren. His history in Egypt—bondage and redemption—was the forerunner of the history of the people who came after him. Israel is the form, the abstract, the idea; the Egyptians, the adorers of the Nile and its animals, are the matter. Form and matter are constantly in conflict. Matter may enslave the form, but cannot destroy it; the form is redeemed (*Gevurath Adonai*, 11). Joseph in the Bible is thus not the symbol of an idea, but a living man. But every time we peruse his history afresh, it tells us something of the redemption announced from the world above.

"Cleaving to God" means being conscious of the eternal world above and soaring towards it through the Torah. Therein lies the perfection of man. For this perfection the laws of the Torah with their constant exhortations and demands are more important than the historical parts. Occasionally the Torah gives a reason for the law, such as neighbourly love, equality before the law, relief of distress. Here the reason is drawn from human life within the material world, but when it comes to laws dealing with attire made from animal and vegetable materials, to dietary laws, sacrifices, or similar laws, it is difficult to find any reason for them. This does not mean that the one kind of law is less divine than the other. Just those for which the reason cannot be found are the proof that the moral and educational value of the laws does not embrace their cosmic significance. In this respect Liwa definitely rejects Maimonides' en-

deavours to find an explanation. "The Torah", says Liwa, "is not something natural, but supernatural. Even when we are dealing with objects of nature such as animals, plants, or human organisms, we are unable to say why certain parts have been created in such or such a form. Yet without them the being could not live. How much less can we find a reason for matters of divine purpose such as the Torah" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 16). "If we are able to find the reason, then the Torah would be no more than a textbook of medicine or natural history. It is here, however, not a question of the order of nature, *i.e.* of material causes and effects, but of a divine, supernatural order. By fulfilling the commandments, we fulfil their supernatural purpose, cling to God and purify ourselves" (ibid., 8). "The commandments are like a rope, which pulls man out of the pit, out of the lower world to the one above" (ibid., 4).

Let us examine the method by which Liwa tried to find in the Torah indications of the connection between the two worlds. In the passage last quoted, he starts from the tradition that the Torah contains 613 precepts, 365 negative ("thou shalt not"), and 248 positive ("thou shalt"). The number of the negative precepts, 365, Liwa compares with the yearly revolutions of the earth round the sun, which determine the order of time in the lower, material, world. By keeping these precepts man helps to maintain the worldly order. The number of positive precepts, 248, corresponds, according to the old Jewish anatomy, to the number of bones in the human body. He who keeps these precepts aims at becoming perfect with all the members of his body and drawing nearer to the upper, divine world (ibid.). This transference of

numbers from one sphere to another, made in all seriousness, may appear to us today as a mere juggling with figures, but in those days men believed that numbers formed the key to secret connections between things. This belief was held not only by Jewish scholars, but also by a large circle of non-Jewish humanists, of whom Reuchlin is an example. Through them it was thought possible to discover a plan in occurrences that appeared accidental; accidents were not admitted. The Jewish religious literature of the Middle Ages is full of interpretations based on the method of numbers. The Cabbala and especially the Zohar practised the art of interpreting mysteries of the Bible through numbers and the value in numbers of the Hebrew Alphabet.

Occasionally these endeavours led to unexpected glimpses into the field of abstract thought. The example cited above shows how Liwa seized the importance of the negative for the order of the corporeal world, whilst the positive was for him a mark of the abstract world. The negative precepts were meant to reduce the dangers lurking in the concrete world, whilst the positive ones, the number of which is noticeably smaller, are directed towards the absolute truth, outside of space and time.

Liwa considers it of no purpose to probe too deeply into the world to come. It is true that "many are confused because neither the Torah nor the prophets speak of the world to come, seeing it is the guarantee of God's love and justice. These questioners, however, liken the words of the Torah to the words of human beings, which is not correct. The language of the Prophets conforms to its subject, and since the world to come is not revealed to man, becomes veiled in speaking of it"

(*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 57). The "place" of the world to come as pictured in human fantasy has not changed from the earliest times till now. The firmament divides the here and the hereafter, the below and the above, the mundane and the supramundane. Liwa uses images corresponding to this conception. God's greatness, which cannot be imagined, consists in "His being above all and at the same time embracing all; everything is in Him, great and small, and His face is turned towards everything" (*Gevurath Adonai*, 67).

All we can say of the world to come is that it is purely spiritual, free from all material admixture. One can therefore, in connection with it, speak neither of space nor of time. Liwa arrives at formulations which are very near to those of succeeding centuries and to modern physics even if we assume that he had indirectly acquired some knowledge of Greek philosophy. "Time", he says, "depends on matter, because time arises out of movement and movement belongs only to matter" (*Gevurath Adonai*, 46). Again: "Movement is temporal . . . and labour is movement" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 40). Thus in Liwa's mind time is a function of matter or movement or labour, and in a world without matter there can be no time. The general idea of time he divides into two, which sounds very like Bergson's philosophy. Liwa refers to the expression in the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, the introduction to the great dissertation on transitoriness: "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven", where the Hebrew words "Zeman" (season) and "Eth" (time) are used. He takes "Zeman" as meaning our time on earth, whilst "Eth" expresses the metaphysical, abstract, and

immutable idea of time. Liwa points out that "Eth" is connected with Ata, "now", a definite moment and the connecting link between the eternity of the world to come and the time process of the world below. Hence there are two kinds of time for the Torah also. For us, the recipients, it belongs to "Zeman", the movement linked with the time "below the sun", by which every interval of time is reckoned. But at every moment the Torah belongs equally to "Eth", the eternal "now", and looks to God, its giver.

This makes clear man's place in the world. Thanks to his intellect he is capable, whilst bound to place and time, of understanding the abstract and timeless world. Of course similar ideas have been expressed in various forms by many philosophers, from the ancient Greeks onwards, but Liwa gave them a peculiar turn. According to him, intellect gives man his chief superiority over other creatures, but at the same time renders him inferior to them. This again reminds one of Bergson. For nature has been created according to a perfect plan, animals and plants fit perfectly into the scheme of nature. Man has the possibility, thanks to his intellect, of getting into touch with the world above, and the more he does so, the nearer he approaches to perfection. From the point of view of nature, therefore, man is less perfect than the other creatures. Liwa points out that man has to labour in order to satisfy even primitive bodily requirements, such as food and clothing. But the mind with which man is endowed calls for labour and exertion, especially when it is a question of perfecting man in his relation to the eternal. "Man is not created in final perfection; but has to realize his perfection himself. This is the meaning

of the verse 'Man is born for travail' . . . Travail is the realization" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 3). Suffering in this world is not caused by the body as such, as if it were something evil and deplorable, but by the fact that all of us are spiritually imperfect. Sufferings are the result of evil inclinations which our intellect cannot master. They remind us of our imperfections and of our duty to improve ourselves, *i.e.* to cling to God and the eternal world (*Netivoth*, xxi).

Human intellect, by its own exertions, is capable of discovering much that is useful and valuable. But it is incapable, when left to itself, even of forming an idea of the truth of the world above. This truth was revealed to the human intellect from above through the Torah, but even so the intellect can only perceive the truth from an earthly point of view. Man feels, although he cannot understand it, that this revelation is absolute and true. This shows the line of demarcation which Liwa draws between Torah and science. Secular knowledge no doubt is also a way to intellectual perfection, but it does not teach how to cleave to God. "Philosophy overlooks the fact that perfection does not arise out of itself, out of intellectuality, and that the essential thing is adherence to God" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 9). He gives a bold explanation why science cannot solve the problem. Science, he says, is based on facts and is therefore dependent on them. On the other hand the truth of the Torah is absolute, because it does not lean on anything. Scientific research carried on by man unaided has a value only as a means for entering more deeply into the absolute truth of the Torah. As an example of the conclusions to which man's unaided intellect can lead him, he cites Plato, who pro-

posed community of wives for the caste of artisans. "How can a rule of life be based on the fallible intellect? The natural world is arranged by God in perfect order, but all that is spiritual must perfect itself" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 17).

Now if the human intellect is the only point where the lower and upper worlds meet, and if this meeting can only be brought about by the Torah, why is it that the Torah has to fight for acknowledgment by man? Why is there the danger that the Torah may be misjudged by the people or even be lost? The greater part of Liwa's writings is virtually a passionate answer to this question.

What we call mind in man has, according to Liwa, three sources: the logically thinking intellect; the soul, perceiving and feeling; and the will, closely connected with the body through action (*Gevurath Adonai*, 41). In making this threefold division, Liwa consciously links himself with Maimonides, but whilst the latter fully discusses his views on psychological questions, Liwa merely suggests them, calling attention at the same time to phenomena which escape the notice of others. Thus he is of opinion, contrary to the ideas of Maimonides, that apart from the three sources mentioned above, there must be in man a fourth one uniting the three, otherwise man would be a tripartite being. Language, for instance, is only possible thanks to this fourth uniting power (*Ner Mitzvah*). The fact of the unity of consciousness was recognized as a psychological problem only in the eighteenth century.

Unified consciousness enables man to employ all his capacities in the world in a threefold manner. There

is first of all the natural behaviour corresponding to the demands of the physical world, "such as ploughing and sowing". Secondly, there is a behaviour which goes beyond nature and "through selection appears as something new". Liwa calls this the moral attitude, as shown for instance in obedience to public and social laws. Lastly there is the religious attitude, which turns man towards God and His will and laws (*Derech Hachayim*, discourses on the third chapter of the Ethics of the Fathers). The natural attitude is enjoined on man by bodily necessity; the moral attitude is required of man living amongst others, but the religious attitude man assumes through free decision of his reason. Here man is no longer limited even in his feelings and inclinations by the corporeal. Love of God and His Torah does not arise from bodily sensations, as does love of fellow beings, but purely from the intellect. We find here exactly that *amor dei intellectualis* which nearly a century later Spinoza made the goal of his contemplation, but which for Liwa was the starting-point.

Liwa sees an allusion to the purely intellectual love of the Torah, free from all personal desire, in the so often cited verse of the Bible, which relates that the people at the foot of Mount Sinai said to Moses: "We shall do it and listen". This sounds strange, as obviously one must first listen before one can act. Liwa explains that at that time the soul of the Israelites was free from all bodily restraint; it was perfect, so that the mind could come to a decision in absolute freedom (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 29). This was the extreme limit which the mind can reach, but in the immaterial spark of the intellect there is always some propensity to love the Torah. It is not the con-

tents of the Torah which convince us of its truth, but the belief in its truth makes us love the contents. "Even the newly-born baby, which physically is still quite unfit for anything, is ready for the Torah" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 5). With this strange-sounding sentence Liwa corroborates the view of the sages that even the newly-born child has a part in the world to come.

Readiness for the Torah is part of the plan of the creation. Israel has been created as the "form" of humanity, which acknowledges the Torah and lives by it. The earthly people of Israel is the community which within humanity has become the bodily covering of that (Aristotelan) "form". It is the prototype of a humanity living in the Torah, man as such (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 1), the "first product" of God, although in body the last amongst the nations (ibid., 18). This nation, differently built from all others, and having its own history, has also in consequence its own mission—readiness for the Torah. Since the Torah, which is exalted above all creations of nature, gives to this people its "peculiar" character, anyone outside of Israel can join it and "become like any other Israelite" (ibid., 1).

Paul was the first to attempt to transform Israel into a purely spiritual body, and since then the Church has considered itself the true Israel. The difference, however, is that, whilst Paul renounces the Torah as a compulsory divine law and sacrifices the national character of its adherents, Liwa venerates it not only for its boundless spiritual aspect, but also for its earthly aspect which require a nation to receive and to interpret it.

While the Torah is the only medium through which the intellect derives certainty about the upper world and

its connection with the corporeal world below, we with our earthly senses can know no more about that world than what the Torah enables us to surmise, and even this we learn from it only by means of human expressions. It is well known how the philosophers of the Middle Ages sought to explain away the accounts in the Torah where God is depicted as acting like a human being. It is written, for instance: "God descended on Mount Sinai." Does this mean, asks Liwa, that God is to be regarded as a human being? Maimonides has pointed out that the Aramaic translation, in order not to give rise to anthropomorphic conception, says: "God revealed himself on Mount Sinai." Liwa, however, is of opinion that a cosmic event beyond our comprehension took place, which translated into human language corresponds to "descent" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 33). According to Liwa one is at liberty to investigate all open and concealed allusions of the Torah to supramundane events, but one must always remain conscious of the fact that from this point of view of the "receiver" this is purely subjective. He specially warns against trying to unveil mysteries of the super-world by speculations about the divine names (ibid., 16).

One thing we certainly learn from the Torah is that in the upper world there are immaterial beings, the messengers of God. Liwa considers them independent creatures and not, as Maimonides explains, popular figures of powers of nature. Jacob's struggle with the angel was the struggle of an immaterial messenger of God with the immaterial in Jacob. Jacob "before all others had the advantage of being like God's image, and Jacob's form is engraved on the throne of the divine

majesty. Therefore the angel only overcame Jacob on the hollow of the thigh, a physically low part of the body" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 19; *Gevurath Adonai*, 67).

There is no reference in the Torah to God's throne, but the prophet Ezekiel mentions it, although he says nothing about Jacob's spiritual image being engraved on it. Liwa, therefore, has other sources besides the Torah from which our intellect can draw ideas of the super-world. Especially he believes firmly in the existence of evil spirits, of whom there is no mention in the Torah. Maimonides characterizes such belief as superstition, contrary to the opinion held generally throughout Europe before the Age of Enlightenment. Liwa is as convinced of the existence of these "Mazikin" (noxious creatures) as of every other truth proclaimed by the Torah. They were created during the dawn of the sixth day as secondary beings, and action taken against them cannot be characterized as magic. Magic means an alteration of the order of nature, which is expressly prohibited by the Torah. It cannot be called magic, nor is it prohibited, to invoke God, even by using His traditional, secret, and mysterious Name, to avert decrees and to guard against evil spirits (*Netivoth*, 17; *Gevuroth*, 38; *Be'er*, second objection). This authentic opinion of a man who in the eyes of posterity is regarded as the great magician must always be kept in mind. Even if today we are more inclined to look on the universe as free from spirits, as already Maimonides did, one must not overlook the fact that certain modern trends of thought, such as pluralism or parapsychology, admit a certain measure of true insight in the popular belief in spirits.

As to the other sources from which our intellect

derives knowledge of the absolute, it must be emphasized that an unsurmountable distance separates them from the holiness of the Bible. The latter alone is the true word of God, the law of the order of both worlds, the "form" of the cosmos. Liwa finds even in the Torah different degrees of holiness between the first four books of Moses and the fifth, wherein Moses sets down his valedictory address to the people and repeats the course of their history. This fifth book is handed down to mankind in the same way as the other four, but these latter are nearer to the divine giver of the Torah, whilst the former, transmitted through the mouth of Moses, is nearer to the recipient. Liwa uses this delicate difference as an explanation of the differences in the formulation of those precepts which are to be found both in the fifth book and in the preceding ones. For instance, the commandment to honour parents has in the fifth book the addition: "that it may go well with thee". The "wellbeing" here affects man personally, whilst in the second book the commandment is pronounced by God Himself and does not require the addition, because God found the creation of the world itself good. Or again the commandment of the Sabbath in the second book reads "Remember the Sabbath day", whilst in the fifth it says: "Keep the Sabbath day". The sages explain the one as a command, the other as a prohibition. Liwa in his own explanation adds that the commandment of the day of rest was addressed by God to all and therefore in Exodus is based on the creation of the world. The prohibition is directed specially to Israel and therefore in Deuteronomy is based on the redemption of the people from Egypt (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 43, 44).

Compared to the Torah, the other books of the Bible have a different degree of holiness, similar to the distinction between Moses and the other prophets. The words of the prophets are also of divine origin, but they were transmitted to them in a different manner. Only occasionally were the words they were to announce placed in their mouth. Moses, however, conveyed the law written down by God Himself to the people and transmitted to them all that he had received from God, as from a person facing him. Religious thought has always been much occupied with the question of intermediaries between the immaterial, immutable God and corporeal man, subject to time. Philo and Christianity made part of God assume a spiritual and even a bodily form, whilst Judaism speaks only of an approach of the human mind to God, and even Jewish mysticism acknowledges only an emanation of the divine majesty. Liwa believed in a special form assigned to Moses, the mediator between God and man. He considers as too materialistic the idea that part of God should disengage itself to form a separate being in order to commune with Moses. On the other hand a spiritual approach of Moses to God is not a sufficient explanation. Liwa expresses himself on this matter in language which almost oversteps the bounds of monotheism. "Moses", he says, "is called in the Torah the man of God (in the original 'Ish Elohim', which could also be translated as 'Man-God'). He was half man, in relation to the earth, half God, in relation to the upper realms. Therefore he could act as mediator between higher and lower. . . . It is also written 'I stand between you and God'" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 21). In Moses' Hebrew name Moshe, consisting of the three

* Personal experience

consonants Mem (m), Shin (s), and Hei (h), Liwa sees also an allusion to his unique task. "Mem", according to Liwa's reckoning, is the sound representing the middle of the Hebrew alphabet. "Shin", as the penultimate letter, indicates that Moses was the only one who reached all the gates of wisdom up to the forty-ninth, the last but one (God alone has entry to all the fifty). "Hei", the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, is the symbol of man as the fifth stage in the order of existence—the elements, lifeless beings, plants, animals, and human beings. Therefore Moses is the mediator between the divine wisdom and man (ibid., and Sermon on the Torah). This arithmetical artifice, which was a common feature of Cabbalistic thought, was to Liwa a proof of the conclusion at which he had also arrived through independent reflection, that Moses was at one and the same time a bodiless being and an incarnate creature of the lower world (*Gevurath Adonai*, 18). This assumption enabled Liwa to find sense in a number of peculiar traditions, for instance, that Moses' mother felt no labour pains at his birth, because the birth of such a spiritual being stood outside ordinary births, to the pains of which Eve was condemned (ibid., 16). In a similar manner he explains why Moses was destined only to marry a non-Jewish woman. According to the Torah the wife is the help-meet of man, and Moses already by himself represents the form of the whole of Israel; while "Israel and the nations form the totality of humanity" (*Be'er*, fifth objection). When dealing with ideas, such as Torah, Israel, Moses, which affect him personally and as a religious man most closely, he never forgets their universal application.

Moses stands above all the others who were endowed with prophetic gifts, because it was only to him that the Torah was revealed. He received not only the Torah, but at the same time also the explanations how to carry out all its precepts. However essential for religious practice may be the oral teaching transmitted to Joshua, the elders, and the succeeding generations, it no longer contains the pure insight of the written teaching: it is concerned with questions of practical application. In the visions of the prophets, although they do not attain to the absolute directness of the Torah, there is still to be found the direct word of God to mankind. After the prophets we find some indirect reflection of the absolute truths in the sayings of the sages, especially in the tales of the Aggadah. For Liwa the great success of Azarya dei Rossi's *Me'ir Enayim*, which enjoyed such a large circulation that a second edition had to be published, was a bad sign of the times. Attempts had been made before to explain somehow the words of the Talmudic sages which were difficult to understand, but to consider them, as Azarya did, merely as the expression of the views of scholars the truth of which was open to criticism, "this had not happened in Israel until today" (*Be'er*, third objection). The sages had received from Moses a tradition regarding the innermost secrets of the truth and clothed it in images which would make it intelligible to the people. "The Aggadah opens the gates to the secret and sealed store of truth; one has only to find the key to open the gate and perceive the store" (*Be'er*, fifth objection). Liwa tried to teach people how to perceive.

On the same level as the Aggadah, which is mostly to

be found in the various collections of the Midrashim, Liwa places the "Bahir", the early work of the Cabbala, and the "Zohar", its classical text-book. He refers to the latter as "Midrash Zohar" (*Be'er*, fifth objection). But he does not, like the other adherents of the Cabbala, investigate the secrets of the super-sensual world, especially not the very beginning of the creation, nor man's passage through the Sephiroth to redemption. The point he reaches in his reflections on the nature of God is to consider how the manifoldness of the world could develop out of God's unity. His answer to this question is that God created only a beginning with a single aim in view, out of which can be explained the further development in all its manifoldness. He discusses, on the basis of Midrashim, wherein lies the aim, whether in the Torah or Israel (*Netzach*, 3), The Zohar on the other hand tries to enter into all the phases of the cosmic process, by which something was created out of nothing, and all its expositions are based on its theory of the creation, this being the world history of the divine evolution. It is certainly true that, when Liwa uses Ezekiel's vision of the four "animal creatures" bearing the chariot of God as a source of the fourfold warning against idolatry ("Thou shalt have no other gods before me; thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them; nor serve them"), he accepts the assertions of the Zohar about the nature and significance of the animal creatures, "familiar to those who know" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 38). Also his method of explaining numbers and words, his application of the geometrical concepts of above, below, right, and left, and his transformation of Biblical events and per-

sonages into immaterial, cosmic symbols—all this is in the spirit of the Cabbala. Nevertheless with him it is always a question of human knowledge and not as with the Cabbala, divine knowledge. When he speaks of the release from the troubles and difficulties of life, he means the perfecting of spiritual man, reliance on God. This can only be achieved by putting into effect the order of the Torah which is not an ethical-social order, but a supernatural, immaterial order. The Cabbala's idea of redemption places man in the service of God, who Himself yearns for our redemption. The practical Cabbala with its ascetic suppression of the material, the later Chassidism with its transports of joyfulness, sought to unite the scattered sparks of the divine in the world and to lead them back to their origin. Liwa observes strictly the boundaries between the earthly reality and the divine superworld. Despite all our ardent desire for the perfect, we are incapable of entering the superworld through our own efforts. We can only grasp passionately what to our intellect appears as a revelation from above, in order to recognize ourselves as human beings in the cosmos. It is the common belief in the cosmic purpose and direction in human actions which brings Liwa close to the Cabbala, and which made the adherents of the Cabbala, and later of Chassidism, regard him as one of themselves.

The destiny of Israel as a community is evidently of a cosmic nature. The creation of the world, says Liwa, was not completed as long as Israel had not come into being. This took place only with the exodus from Egypt. "The completion of Israel was the completion of the world" (*Tiphereth Yisrael*, 44). Although Israel, as a

spiritual form, was already created before the materia world, it only now received its bodily form as a people Palestine was allocated to this bodily form as a habita tion, in order that spirit and body might be kept togethe in unity (*Netivoth Olam*, iv, 5). This land, as long Israel dwells in it, has in itself something immaterial. Midrash illustrates this by pointing to the fact that frui ripens there in a supernaturally short time. "When Israe does no longer inhabit its own land, the land loses supermundane quality" (*Netzach*, 6). The expulsion the people from their land is therefore not a purely historical event, but one affecting the whole world: th order of the world has been disturbed. This according Liwa is the meaning of the saying that God's majesty with the people in the Diaspora. Diaspora is confusion The political world of the other nations remains disturbed as long as this unnatural disorder continues. From hi view of the cosmos Liwa derives a new, highly realisti definition of the diaspora, one of great internationa significance.

In accordance with tradition he ascribes the diaspor to the sins of the people. He is, however, occupied with questions of a different nature, for instance, how is on to reconcile the sins of one generation with the unheard- of weight and duration of the sufferings. His answer this is that the sin of idolatry in Israel is much mor serious than in other nations. For Israel it means departure from its form, a betrayal of the Creation. "The people of Israel are inclined to extremes: they are righteous or sinful. If sinful they are great sinners, righteous they are outstanding" (*Gevurath Adonai*, 23). Israel's transgressions cannot be measured, nor atoned

aterial manner. Israel has to endure the order to recapture its immaterial form, in rn to itself (*Netzach*, 14). The deliverance, es, will not be called forth by Israel's merits. not look to the righteousness of Israel, He people by His own wish, because He wants in this manner, by the mercy of God which reated or won, Israel will always be delivered, st time, from Egypt" (*Gevurath Adonai*, 24). when men's minds were full of the expecta- Iessiah, Liwa abstained from all calculations deemer might arrive, because in accordance ic outlook, he considered the Messiah as an being. The Messiah is a consequence of the tion. "The birth of the Messiah is not an because it is something not material, but at he was born, according to the Midrash, the destruction of the Temple, means that from the Messianic power which arose in ly after the destruction of the Temple. The the Temple is the postulate of his existence. ce is still prevented everywhere by the of iniquity. When the time comes God world of these powers, and then at last the ssiah will be born" (*Netzach*, 26). Liwa con- coming of the Messiah as an event which God's firstborn people, in the same way nations. This leads him to the surprising Messiah on one side will be of non-Jewish as David descended from a Moabite woman from an Ammonite one. For God wants arise as an entirely new being, and there-

fore grafts him from a different stock. Therefore the non-Jews will fight the Messiah, especially the incomplete one, the son of Joseph. They will kill him and exercise their cruel power over the Jews in order to defend their idolatry. These will be the labour-pangs of the Messiah, the times of Gog and Magog. It will be a fight of the multitude against the unity, and as Israel itself, through the unity of God, is a unity, it means a fight against God. Only the real Messiah, the son of David, will restore unity to Israel and to the world. The diaspora, the disorder in the world, will be put straight by the Messiah. The former existence of man will finally disappear, so that a complete renewal may become possible (*Netzach*, 31–8).

One cannot force the coming of the Messiah, but one can prepare for it by simplicity and humility, the greatest of all virtues. These, says Liwa, are the signs that the manifold, the material, has been overcome. It is not knowledge that leads to God, but humility (*Netivoth*, ix, 1).

These thoughts about Israel and the nations remind one of what has been said earlier about Moses and his wife. They are also very similar to the fundamental questions of Paul: about the undeserved grace, the changing of human existence at the time of the Messiah, and Israel as a spiritual unity, leading to the unity of nations. Paul's questions are purely Jewish, but not so his answers, except that he also believes, as Liwa did, that the greatest virtues, paving the way to the Messiah, are humility and simplicity.

Israel was dispersed amongst all nations, and not driven into one particular land, because the diaspora is a disorder of the whole world. "Every nation, like Israel, has

its appointed place. Whatever leaves its appointed, natural place for another one cannot remain constantly in it, but returns to the former place. If this were not so, the unnatural would become natural, which is not possible. According to the order of the creation, the land of Israel was allotted to that nation. If Israel were to continue to remain in the diaspora, it would mean that the unnatural had become nature" (*Netzach*, 1). From this follows the necessity of Israel's return to its own land. Israel's offence of baseless hatred, that is, the inner discord which the Midrash considers as one of the causes of the fall of the nation, was certainly an offence against its unity and thus against the unity of God. Therefore it lost its natural place for a time. Only this was a cosmic affair between Israel and God, and the other nations have no right to consider themselves superior to Israel and to enslave it. This view does away with the general belief of the Jews up to the Age of Enlightenment that the outward sufferings in the diaspora were inflicted for former sins and that the nations were to a certain extent the executors of the punishment ordained by God. The diaspora is the great sorrow of the Jewish people, but it is an inner sorrow in which the nations have no right to interfere with their arrogance and physical superiority. If the Jews of the time of enlightenment had kept to this belief of Liwa, they would never have succumbed to the feeling of national inferiority which they endeavoured to counteract by believing in a divine mission amongst the nations.

Two hundred years before the American movement for freedom and the French Revolution awakened in the peoples the idea of equality of nations, Liwa had already,

through his belief in the cosmic order, enunciated it in the following terms: "Since every nation has been created as a separate entity, no nation has the right of ruling over another" (ibid.). "It is against nature and against the order of the world that one nation should be subject to another" (ibid., 24). The fundamental harm caused by opposition to nature affects not only Israel, but also the nations amongst which it is dispersed. Through the "sick" Israel in the diaspora, they also become disordered. The damage cannot be repaired as long as Israel is unable to return to its unity, as an independent people, in the land of Israel. "Whilst Israel is dispersed, existence is thereby annihilated. For every active being is independent and not under the dominion of another being. . . . Whereas Israel has to be regarded amongst the nations as if it did not exist at all. This position of Israel puts the world out of order" (*Be'er*, fourth objection). The entirely new idea arising out of this that the return of Israel to the promised land means a return of the world to health is only briefly but very decisively indicated by Liwa (*Netzach Yisrael*, 24). It reminds one of Theodor Herzl, who three hundred years later expressed a similar idea in a secular form, namely that the Jewish people must be gathered again in their land, because the world needed this.

Thus the order of the world demands that the diaspora should end one day. At the same time Liwa is disturbed by the thought that through the diaspora the Jewish people may have lost their peculiar nature as God's people. "When one considers what has been vouchsafed to God's own people and to no other" (*i.e.* the revelation of the Torah) "and, thinks of all the many

sorrows which have befallen them, how they have been humiliated and have sunk into the dust, one could be led to conclude that perhaps God had forsaken Israel and that it, God himself forbid, meant no more to Him, or even less than any other people." After an obvious struggle within himself Liwa raises his voice and proclaims: "If such thoughts should arise within you, do not give heed to them, because experience and reason show conclusively that it is not so, and such thoughts cannot be reconciled with what one feels" (ibid., 10). In no period in its history has Israel accepted a teaching other than the Torah. Only if this had happened could it have lost the peculiar quality that made it a nation. Through the *one* Torah they became the *one* people. God's name (El) in the name Israel is a chain that binds them for ever with God; this chain cannot be broken. His name is always connected with them. "How could they have stood up against the four empires of the diaspora (Babylon, Media, Greece, and Rome) if God's hand had not protected them? God's Shechinah is with the humiliated, and Israel is humiliated in the diaspora, as it is written: 'I shall dwell with the lowly and with those whose minds are distressed'" (ibid.). No, Israel may be enslaved, but God has not forsaken him, and he will remain God's people after the return to the promised land. It sounds almost paradoxical that Liwa sees in God's nearness in the diaspora a lesser wonder than His nearness at the time of the return to the promised land. The reason is that at the time of the Messiah the whole of mankind will be united and all peoples will be equally near to God. Yet the old proclamation that Israel is God's firstborn will remain in force, and just as

it conduces to the unity of that people today, so it will in the days to come.

Liwa is very deeply concerned about the preservation of Israel's unity in the diaspora. He deals with it at length in several of his works, because he sees the real danger and trial of the diaspora in the disturbance of that unity on which the existence of Israel depends. This unity is always in danger in the diaspora, however great the number of Jews may be there, because they are not an independent community, but subjected to another nation. "When Israel lives amongst the nations and even thousands of Jews live together, they still are considered as dispersed amongst the nations" (*Or Chadash*). It is not a question of material prospects, of outward rights and freedoms, but of the cosmic substance of the people, of its immaterial background. As the diaspora is ordained by God, the maintenance of the unity is "a pledge for the divine glory, the Shechinah which accompanied Israel into the diaspora and which will return with them from there" (*Netivoth*, i, 1).

Liwa sees three means for enabling the people to elevate itself above the mundane powers of the diaspora and preserve the unifying force which formerly emanated, materially and spiritually, from the soil of Eretz Israel and the Temple. These three means are: Communal prayer, charity, and study of the Torah. "Communal prayer raises the dispersed people above the sphere of the power of the nations and leads to their unity." "Communal prayer is like an exodus of Israel out of the diaspora because they turn unitedly to God, step forth from the nations, and raise themselves above them." Next is charity, through which man imitates God. "Therefore

the world was created, that man influenced by God's love should resemble Him and himself influence others in the same way. For this virtue Avram (Abraham's earlier name: Av=father, Ram=elevated) became the father of many peoples, elevated above many." The Torah leads to the highest elevation above the powers of this world, "because the Torah emanates from the spiritual world". But to study the Torah alone is not enough. "Without charity it is only an intellectual enlightenment, and not an ascent. Charity and Torah should be combined." "Through communal prayer the dispersed people gather and unite together in the lower world. Through charity and the study of the Torah man raises himself to the higher, more perfect world' (*Netzach*, 10; *Netivoth*, iii, 1, 2; *Or Chadash*).

Such is the range of Liwa's thought. By combining in his mental outlook, and no doubt also in his daily life, mysticism with realism, Liwa became enveloped in an aura of magic which not only greatly impressed posterity, but also provided it with that great legendary character it needed in its longing for redemption.

IV
THE LEGEND

THE belief that some people are able by means of some occult knowledge to make the powers of nature subservient to them has lasted right down to modern times. There have always been men who found great joy in trying to penetrate into the mysterious and even in visualizing the possibility of doing so. From the end of the sixteenth century more and more attention was devoted to the study of the Cabbala, and through the influence of the Safed circle it inclined more and more to magic and wonder-working. It was based on the longing for the Messianic deliverance from the sufferings of the diaspora. The persecutions of the Jews in Eastern Europe after the Thirty Years War led to an increased secret reliance on exorcisms and amulets. At the same time, the belief in spirits and supernatural acts had to be subject to the belief in God's will. It is God who empowers certain selected people to achieve the supernatural. Therefore religious purity, high erudition, and an intimate knowledge of the divine word are presuppositions of such magical and legendary power. At the very least those men must appear to posterity as endowed with such "majesty" and "holiness". A figure like Doctor Faustus, oscillating between God and Satan, would be unthinkable as the kind of legendary person described above.

Amongst the scholars of recent times there is none who has given rise to more legends among the Jews than

Rabbi Liwa. The legends about Israel Baal-Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism in the eighteenth century, are no doubt richer, but they are so closely connected with his religious activity that, unlike the legends about the Great Rabbi Loew, they did not penetrate to the rest of the Jews and certainly not to the non-Jewish world.

It is difficult to ascertain when the first legends about Rabbi Loew arose. Perles' family chronicles of 1727 mention nothing about the Golem legend, which became the best known. The first indication of Rabbi Loew's supernatural activity appears in 1709, just one hundred years after his death. Naftali Kohen, a great-great-grandson of Liwa, himself one of the great rabbinical authorities of his time, was approached by another scholar, Rabbi Zvi Chacham, for his opinion on a religio-juridical question. Naftali Kohen replied to it by referring to "his ancestor, the Maharal of Prague, who, as is well known, made use of the holy spirit". Zvi Chacham incorporated this letter in his collection of Responsa (No. 76). Perhaps Naftali Kohen's remark referred only to the amulets, which people would have been glad to ascribe to Rabbi Liwa. Yair Bacharach, a similar descendant of Liwa, states in a manuscript which has been preserved that he owned such an amulet. In any case at that time reports about the cabbalistic activity of the Great Rabbi were freely circulated, although the Golem does not seem to have been included in them. Chacham Zvi, in a Responsum of the same year (No. 93) dealing exclusively with the Golem, mentions as examples only a statement from the Talmudic tractate Sanhedrin, and the Golem of Eliyahu of Chelm. Likewise Perles, fifteen years later, knows nothing about a Golem of Rabbi

Loew, although his family chronicles were written for Yesaiya, a brother of Naftali Kohen, who no doubt was also an adherent of Cabbalistic magic. It is said that Naftali Kohen, who was born in 1678 in Posen and acted there for some time as Rabbi, fixed to his house the head of a stag filled with texts, by which he thought he could guard the lane against fire. Later, in 1711, when Kohen became Chief Rabbi of Frankfort on Main, a fire broke out in his house, and spread through the whole Jewish quarter. Naftali was accused of having caused the fire through his exorcisms. He was arrested, but had to be released owing to lack of proof against him. He then went to Prague, where the study of the Cabbala was in full swing. David Oppenheimer, Chief Rabbi, whose collection of manuscripts forms today the pride of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, was a convinced Cabbalist. Many wandering Cabbalists settled in Prague, for instance Chayon, well known in the whole of Europe, who attracted the young people; also the young Jonathan Eibenschütz, one of the most fascinating figures of his epoch, to whose amulets was imputed some connection with the Messianic claims of Sabbatai Zvi. Naftali Kohen increased the fame of Prague as a centre of the Cabbala. He later set out to emigrate to Eretz Israel, but like Rabbi Liwa's grand-daughter Eve, the sister of his grandfather, he did not reach his destination. He fell ill in Constantinople and had a vision of a visit from the patriarchs, which fortified him to such an extent that he was able to walk about in his room a few hours before his death. In 1863 a descendant of Naftali, in connection with a new edition of the Perles family chronicles, published Naftali's will and an account of his last hours. Between

1710 and 1730 the Great Rabbi Loew became more and more a central figure of Cabbalistic legend, but his connection with the legend of the Golem cannot be dated earlier than 1730.

The oldest legends are probably those connected with definite places in Prague. Perles mentions such a legend, the only one that is to be found in his short chronicle. We have seen that amongst the children of Bezalel, the son of Rabbi Liwa, there was one, Samuel, to whom his grandfather was particularly attached. Samuel later on became the first president of the community and died in 1666. The legend says that the Great Rabbi Liwa had promised Samuel a burial place next to his own grave. When Samuel felt his end approaching, he called the wardens of the burial society and told them about his grandfather's orders. The wardens pointed out that the place next to Rabbi Liwa's grave had become far too narrow. Samuel, however, insisted. When he died, the wardens, much concerned, visited the cemetery in order to look again at the place required. They suddenly noticed that the tomb had withdrawn to the side, so as to leave room for the new grave, and Samuel could be buried there. Even today the visitor is struck by the high and narrow tombstone next to the grave of the Great Rabbi Loew. There is as yet not much magic in the legend. It tries to explain the somewhat incongruous smallness of the tombstone as compared with the many texts on it. It makes use of the common belief that the dead in their graves have accurate knowledge of the life around them.

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century this legend of Rabbi Loew is the only one which we find in writing. The stories were only transmitted orally, and many must

have been lost or been changed from their original form in the process. In 1847 Pascheles, a Prague publisher, issued a collection of popular "Sippurim" (tales), in which L. Weisel, a well-known Prague doctor, tells four stories about the Great Rabbi Loew. He introduces them with the remark that no doubt they were known amongst the people, but could not be omitted from a collection of tales of the Prague Ghetto. In the same volume a certain C. Ludwig Kapper tells a story about Rabbi Loew and a Count, which combines incidents from several legends. Some of these are also mentioned by Weisel, which shows how these tales circulated. Such are the first, rather late, references. But there are also others.

Some material, collected from oral sources, can be found in such works as: the appendix to the new edition of Perles family chronicles (Warsaw 1869, London 1902); *Bilder aus meiner Knabenzeit* (*Pictures of my Boyhood*) by L. Kalisch (1872); *Old Bohemian Tales*, by the renowned Czech story-teller Alois Jirásek; *Böhmische Sagen*, by the Jewish writer Oscar Wiener of Prague. In 1909 Jüdel Rosenberg published in Warsaw a small volume, *The Miracles of the Maharal* (*Niphlaoth Ha-Maharal*, also issued in a German rendering by Chaim Bloch), which professed to be based on a manuscript which had lain for three hundred years in the library of Metz. This manuscript was said to have been acquired, together with Rabbi Liwa's manuscript about the Sabbath, by a certain Chayim Scharfstein, and Rosenberg bought from him the publishing rights. The Great Rabbi Loew's son-in-law, Rabbi Yitzchak Kohen, was said to be the author of the manuscript, and it would therefore be a document contemporary with the actual miracles. The work shows

knowledge of Rabbi Liwa's family affairs, but none of the position of the Jews of Prague at the time, nor of Prague topography. The eighteen stories cleverly revolve around one motive: the Maharal creates a Golem, with the aid of whom he first of all counters the accusations of ritual murders. When this peril is finally removed by an Imperial edict, Rabbi Loew transforms the Golem back into a lump of clay. But just the time of Rudolf II, which is the period of the stories, was a favourable one for the Jews, and there were then no proceedings of such a kind in Bohemia. Thus the historical background of the stories falls away. There are also details showing an ignorance of the topography which would have been impossible for anyone living in Prague. For instance, the very broad river on which Prague stands is called "Moldavka". In Czech the river was then already called Vltava, or in German, Moldau. The addition of the Slav diminutive sounds very strange.

In connection with this work mention must also be made of another by Rosenberg, *Choshen Hamishpat* (1913); also of an allegedly original letter of the Great Rabbi Loew about the creation of the Golem and the audience with Rudolf. The letter places this in the year 1573, twenty years before the actual occurrence, when Rudolf was not yet Emperor and thus again shows a false historical background. Nevertheless Rosenberg's work, thanks to the way in which he combined various legendary incidents in an emotional and often dramatic manner, enjoyed a wide circulation. Micha ben Gorion selected a number of the stories for his *Fountain of Judah*, and Leivick based on them his drama *The Golem*, which the Habimah presented to the whole world. However,

as old legendary material Rosenberg's stories are of no value.

Among the other legends which, like the one in Perles' family chronicles, refer to localities in Prague, there is one which explains the strange name of the Beleles lane. The subjects of this legend, the danse macabre, the robbing of the shroud, the price of its return, seem to show that non-Jewish motives were grafted on to a still older legend. Jewish ideas know nothing of dances of the dead amongst the graves between midnight and one o'clock, as indicated by the striking of clocks. It may be that in the original legend the prophet Elijah gave the Rabbi certain signs by which the culprits could be recognized.

Another group of legends is connected with the deep impression created amongst the people by the audience of the Great Rabbi Loew with the Emperor Rudolf, especially on account of the mysterious silence observed about it. Cabbalistic fantasy found the motive for the audience in the Rabbi's magical devices or in his elucidation of certain riddles in the life of the Emperor. The single audience grew into repeated mutual visits and the intercourse with the Emperor into intercourse with other aristocrats. It is related in the "Sippurim" that the Emperor, accompanied by Tycho Brahe, visited the Great Rabbi Loew in his modest house in the Ghetto. In order that the Emperor should feel at home, Rabbi Loew conjured the castle of Hradschin into the interior of his house. The visitors were very greatly astonished by this miracle and heaped presents on the Rabbi. A similar tale was told to Kalisch when a boy by his grandmother: that Rabbi Loew had conjured up for the

Emperor a summer garden in the middle of winter. Similar fancies are found elsewhere, *e.g.* in the legends about Albertus Magnus, the great Christian theologian of the thirteenth century.

More appropriate for a Rabbi is the following legend, also to be found in the "Sippurim", and commented on by Jirásek. The Emperor once expressed a wish to see the Patriarchs and the sons of Jacob, and asked the Rabbi to conjure them up from the beyond. After hesitating for a long time, the Rabbi consented, but made the condition that the Emperor should not laugh, no matter what he saw. On a certain day the incantation took place in a remote apartment of the castle. The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob appeared in all their majesty and the Emperor was greatly awed. Then Jacob's strong sons made their appearance, and as Naphtali, "the hind let loose", as he is called in Jacob's blessing, jumped across the ears of corn and flax stalks, in order to catch up with the others, the Emperor forgot his promise and started to laugh. Immediately the apparitions disappeared, and the ceiling of the apartment started to descend and would have crushed the Emperor had the Rabbi not stopped it by a word of command. Even today there is a room in the castle closed to the public because the ceiling has given way.

To the same group of legends belongs one which is mentioned in the supplement of the new Warsaw edition of Perles' family chronicles. The commentator, a Rabbi of Pinsk, cites as his authority a personal letter of a certain Chief Rabbi Jacob Schur, who communicated to him a report transmitted to him by his father about the subject of the conversation in Liwa's audience with the Emperor

Rudolf. The Emperor had discovered a strange discord in his nature: he had always felt a hatred of the Jews, but whenever he met one, he felt particularly drawn to him. This conflict of feeling disturbed him greatly, and he resolved to confide in the Great Rabbi Loew, about whose gift of vision he had heard, and to consult him about the cause of this feeling. This led to the audience. The Emperor put his question and the Rabbi asked to be left alone in an adjoining room, until the heavens should vouchsafe him an answer. After a short while the Rabbi returned to the Emperor and gave him the following explanation:

The Emperor's parents had had no children. His reputed father suffered from a constitutional disability, but he blamed his wife for not having children. This led to quarrels, and the Empress was afraid that the Emperor might divorce her. A handsome young Jew often frequented the palace and the Empress had secret hopes that she might have a child by him. The pious Jew evaded all temptations until the Empress declared that if he did not listen to her, she would procure a decree for destroying all the Jews in the land. The Jew did not know what to do and applied for guidance to the Rabbinical College. The College, recognizing the great danger threatening the many tens of thousands of Jews, issued a written declaration permitting the Jew to fulfil the wish of the Empress. The Jew put the document in an earthenware pot and hid it under the threshold of one of the rooms of the palace. The Great Rabbi Loew accurately indicated the place, the document was found there, and the Emperor learned that his real father had been a Jew.

This legend must have had its origin in Poland, cer-

tainly not in Bohemia or Austria. It shows an entire lack of knowledge of the family affairs of the Imperial House and transfers the decisive factor in the revelation, the finding of the document, to Prague, where Rudolf II was the first Emperor of the Habsburg dynasty to take up permanent residence. It is, however, remarkable that the legends about the Great Rabbi Loew emanate also from outside Bohemia. Another example follows below.

Another story revealing events of the past is related by Kapper in the "Sippurim". Not far from Prague there lived a Count who had great influence with the Emperor. He lived a secluded life, occupying himself with the study of alchemy and astrology. He often invited Rabbi Loew to his castle, where the two discoursed on secret sciences. One day the Count asked the Rabbi how it was possible for him to accommodate his four hundred disciples in his little house. The Rabbi replied that there was room for even a much larger number and invited the Count to visit him when convenient. A day was fixed and the Count arrived at the Rabbi's poor-looking house, accompanied by several friends and attendants. As soon as they entered they were surprised by the splendour of the large rooms, filled with choice works of art. They were served with an elaborate meal on silver plates and in golden cups. The Count ordered one of his attendants secretly to remove one of the cups, and the guests left the house full of praise and admiration. Some days later the Count was told that just at the time of his visit to the Rabbi, a castle in Bohemia had disappeared with all its valuables, but had returned to its old place within a few hours.

Nothing was missing of the valuables except one golden cup. The Count knew now that it was the Rabbi who with the help of magic had prepared the whole reception, although he always tried to evade an answer to the question whether he had magical powers. At the next visit, however, after the incident of the cup, he had to admit his cabbalistic arts, and the Count insisted on being initiated by the Rabbi into the secrets of the Cabbala. This the Rabbi emphatically declined to do. The Count thereupon flew into a rage and declared that, if the Rabbi persisted, he would induce the Emperor to order the execution of the Rabbi and his whole family. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, the Rabbi finally made the following proposal to the Count: he would ask a friend of his in Saragossa, Don Abraham, to come to Prague at once and undertake the desired instruction. The Count agreed, and the Rabbi retired to his house, pondering in deep concern how to make clear to his friend in Spain the urgency of the difficult journey. It was Friday and time to go to Synagogue. Delay was dangerous. Suddenly the door opened and in came the Rabbi's friend, Don Abraham. He said he had seen in a dream the danger in which his friend stood and he had set out immediately on the journey. Secret powers indicated to him the shortest route. Rabbi Loew then told his friend about the Count and Don Abraham declared himself ready to start teaching him. On Sunday a messenger was dispatched to the Count to announce the surprising arrival of Don Abraham from Saragossa, and a few days later the first meeting took place. The Count led Rabbi Loew and his friend into a special room, draped with black material. Then Don Abraham said:

"The Cabbala is based on the belief in a one and only God. Only people who are guiltless of evil deeds can be initiated into this art. Therefore answer me: Are you free from guilt?" "I am," replied the Count. Don Abraham then told the Count to look behind him. There stood a woman with a child in her arms. "Do you know these?" asked Don Abraham. Greatly startled the Count exclaimed: "My sister and her child!" The apparition disappeared and Don Abraham said: "That was your sister and her—your—child. You yourself have destroyed them." The Count confessed his crime and, deeply contrite, asked that silence should be kept about it. The Rabbi and his friend returned to Prague.

Here also elements of several legends are united in one tale. This comes out particularly in the fact that the action is transferred from Rabbi Loew to a friend of his from Spain, a country which was no longer inhabited by Jews. The magical occurrences in this and other legends were far removed from the spirit shown in Rabbi Liwa's works, wherein he always proclaimed that all magic, unless it meant the averting of evil destiny through the power of prayer, was reprehensible. But the legend expresses through him the longing of an age in which the practical application of the Cabbala was rampant. Only in one legend, of which the author learned in his parents' house in Prague, is there no mention of magic, and that legend, therefore, may only have arisen during the Age of Enlightenment:

Whenever Rabbi Loew was invited to a meal with the Emperor, he always brought with him his own food and utensils, in accordance with the dietary laws. The Emperor, who had noticed that the food was always

prepared in the same manner, once thought of putting the Rabbi to the test. The Imperial chef was ordered to prepare for the next visit of the Rabbi a certain dish in exactly the same manner as the one which the Rabbi brought with him. The meal had just started, when the Emperor rose and asked his guest, before continuing the meal, to come with him into the adjoining room where he would show him a new instrument. Meantime, as arranged beforehand, the Rabbi's own food was exchanged for the dish from the Imperial kitchen. When they again sat at the table, the Rabbi did not touch any more of the food. In reply to the Emperor's question he asked to be forgiven, but there was a regulation that one must not continue to eat a dish, once one had risen from the table. The Emperor, ashamed, confessed what he had done, and expressed his admiration of the wisdom of the rabbinic laws.

Two legends about the death of the Great Rabbi Loew are of a purely cabbalistic-mystical character. The origin of the one can be traced to Poland by the fact that in it the Rabbi is made to die there of the plague. The legend, based on oral tradition, can be found in *Sagen und Erzählungen aus der Provinz Posen* (1893) by the Christian scholar Koop, and also in J. Bergmann's *Legenden der Juden*. One night before the High Holy days in Posen, Rabbi Loew saw a light in the Synagogue opposite to his house. He went there and found a strange creature sharpening a shining knife in front of a long list of names. Rabbi Loew, horrified, ran away, but it suddenly occurred to him that the strange creature must be the Angel of Death and that the list contained the names of those who were to die of the plague. He hurried back to the Synagogue and snatched the list from the hands of the Angel of Death. Returning home he read the list and found there the names of the most eminent members of the Community. But one portion of the list had remained in the hand of the Angel of Death, the one with the name of the Great Rabbi Loew. When the Holy days were over, he fell ill and died. The legend belongs to a time when the Rabbi's grave in Prague was not yet visited by the Jews of the whole world. Likewise, the connection of the Golem legend with Prague was as yet unknown.

The other legend about the death of the Great Rabbi Loew emanates from Prague and tells how the Angel of Death could not get at him. The Angel finally hid himself in the fragrance of a rose which the Rabbi's granddaughter brought to her grandfather. This legend gave the sculptor Ladislaus Šaloun the inspiration for his Rabbi Loew monument, which stands in front of the new town hall in Prague.

The most famous of all the legends about the Great Rabbi Loew, the one about his Golem, seems to have arisen only after most of the legends mentioned above had already obtained a wide circulation. There is no other legend so intimately connected in the popular mind with the person of the Great Rabbi Loew as the one about the Golem, and all later legends would not have omitted to use this *motif* whenever it was possible. There are Golem legends about other miracle workers, before and after Rabbi Loew, but none became so widely spread as that of the Golem of Prague.

There is a general *motif* in the tales of all peoples that lifeless unformed material—this is the meaning of the Hebrew word Golem—is transformable into a living

creature. The Greek philosopher and satirist Lucian of the second century A.D. tells in his Philopseudes of an Egyptian priest who created for himself an artificial attendant. Goethe's *Apprentice-Sorcerer* (*Zauberlehrling*) has made famous the story of the apprentice who, in the absence of his master by means of a formula which he had learnt conjured up an attendant to fetch water for a bath, but forgot the counter-formula to make him disappear again, and so stood helplessly in front of the inundation until his master returned and delivered him. Albertus Magnus is credited with creating beings from metal, automatons who served him at meals and could even talk. The Tractate Sanhedrin (65b) of the Babylonian Talmud relates that Raba, who lived in the fourth century A.D., created a man and sent him to Rabbi Zera. When the latter noticed that the messenger could not speak, he exclaimed: "I see you belong to that crew; return to dust!" and the messenger turned into dust. There follows a story about Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Oshaya, who with the aid of the book *Yetzirah* (The Creation) created every Friday a calf which they consumed. Rashi, the eleventh-century commentator, explains that the words "with the aid of the book *Yetzirah*" mean that it taught them about the number of the letters in God's name. Two characteristic features of the Jewish legends are here exhibited: the creation of an artificial being from earth and the bringing of it to life by means of the name of God. The first is an "imitation of God", who created the first man out of dust. The other substitutes God's name for the divine breath which animated the clod of earth, thereby subordinating all power of animating to the power of God.

The *Yetzirah* is the earliest Cabbalistic work, and is already mentioned in the Talmud. It explains the creation of the world by the power of letters and numbers, but it says nothing about the creation of an artificial being. Only in the much later commentary of Eleazar of Worms composed at the beginning of the thirteenth century did G. Scholem for the first time come across the expression "Golem" in the sense of an artificially created being, together with a formula for fashioning it. "He who consults the book Yetzirah must first take a cleansing bath and don white garments. He then takes virgin soil from a mountain which has not been dug by men, soaks it in well water and makes the Golem, forming each member by reciting alphabetic permutations." In the *Yetzirah* the letters of the divine name, which according to the Talmud numbered 12, 42, and even 72, were subjected to permutation, each member of the human body corresponding to a certain combination of letters.

The creation of the Golem drew in its train the further *motif* of preserving or destroying its vitality. From the tenth century there was a universal belief that small paper or metal labels, with the divine name—the "Shem"—inscribed on them in a certain way, could restore life, if placed on the forehead or under the tongue of the lifeless body. Such a label was also attached to the Golem. The spoken word which had instilled life into the Golem was no longer sufficient; it remained alive only as long as the "Shem" was attached to it. This combination of Golem and "Shem" appears first in Poland, in connection with Eliyahu of Chelm. The historical Eliyahu was slightly older than the Great Rabbi Loew and likewise became the central figure of a legend. Chacham Zvi, in

his Responsa (No. 93) which appeared in 1712, names Eliyahu as one of his ancestors and as creator of a Golem. How earnestly he believed in the existence of a Golem is shown by his question whether a Golem, created on the strength of *Yetzirah*, can be counted as a member of a "Minyan", a praying community consisting of at least ten persons. And Chacham Zvi was even an enemy of all religious excesses. Not only the Jews believed in a Golem, but also non-Jews, as is expressly testified by the Christian scholar Schudt in his *Jüdische Merkwürdigkeiten* (Jewish curiosities) (1714).

Jacob Emden, a son of Chacham Zvi, the implacable opponent of Eibenschütz, tells the story of the Golem of Chelm, as handed down in his family. His ancestor Eliyahu created the Golem as a dumb servant and attached to his forehead the "Shem" written on parchment. Through this the Golem received a constant power, which increased as time went on. Eliyahu at last recognized the danger, got hold of the Golem and tore the parchment from its forehead. The mass of clay collapsed, but in its fall wounded its master in the face. This shows that the Golem remains alive through the "Shem", and this living force acts independently of man, nay, leads eventually to a struggle with the Golem, which literally threatens to outgrow man. The connecting link between the Golem of Worms and the Golem of Chelm can probably be found in the following legend, which has survived in many Jewish sources and which is mentioned by Reuchlin—who evidently also believed in artificial beings—in his work on the Cabbala (1517): The prophet Jeremiah and his son had created a man who on his forehead bore the word "Emeth" (Truth—a synonym

of God). They removed the first letter, making it sound "Meth" (dead), and the creature fell down lifeless. Already here life is connected with the "name", and at least one letter must be removed in order that life may cease.

Even in the fourteenth century voices were raised against the belief in artificial creations, as being a denial of God's sole creative power. Immanuel de Roma, in his epic, banished the Arabic philosopher Avicenna to Hell, because he had believed in the possibility of an artificial being, an Homunculus. But the cabbalistic desire was stronger and finally even rationalistically inclined men believed in the actuality of a Golem. Joseph Delmedigo, who had travelled through Europe, relates in one of his works, *Metzareph Lachochmah* which appeared in Basle in 1629, that he had heard many stories of a Golem, especially in Germany. To call an awkward person a "clay Golem" (*lehmigen Golem*) became an idiom amongst the Jews of Central Europe. The Gaon Elijah of Wilna, the bitter opponent of Chassidism, who died in 1797, told one of his pupils that when he was thirteen years old he wanted to create a Golem, but whilst he was working on it a vision made him desist. Nevertheless he was later credited with having created a Golem, just as Baal Shem, his opponent, the founder of Chassidism, had been. Even of Akiba Eger, who acted up till 1837 in Posen as the highest Talmudic authority of his time, it was related for generations that he had created Golems which served him until the Sabbath. Here one can clearly trace the influence of the Prague Golem legend.

After the Golem legend had reached Prague from

Worms by way of Chelm—not earlier than 1730—and had there become attached to the figure of the Great Rabbi Loew, who already was the centre of legends, the various elements of the legend were combined into a final form. In the Golem, created out of a lump of clay, life is awakened by means of the "Shem". He serves in mechanical obedience, and after being left to his own senseless power, is converted by his master back into the original mass by removing the "Shem". There is a further point not found elsewhere: the Golem rests on the Sabbath day. On that day he is deprived of the "Shem" which, according to the Prague version, he carries under his tongue. Through this he appears to become a member of human society, though at the same time, in matters pertaining to holiness, he stands apart as something inanimate. The Prague version overcomes, without lessening, the uncanny feeling aroused by the conception of a mechanical, anthropomorphous being, a feeling for which there may be various psychological explanations. It is overcome by the constantly renewed superiority of the human mind over matter, yet remains unweakened owing to the dull power mysteriously inherent in matter. In order to protect themselves against this mystery, people have recourse to the wisdom of certain individuals. Thus through the legend the bond between the people and the Great Rabbi Loew became stronger and more intimate. Practically only one legend about the Golem of Prague has survived, but it draws this bond very close, so that other legends of a Prague Golem, if they did exist at one time, would have appeared as simple episodes of the central legend.

The legend appeared for the first time in print in the

"Sippurim" of 1847. It requires to be supplemented by a tradition which circulated in Prague.

The Great Rabbi Loew created a servant out of clay. He placed a "Shem" under his tongue and thereby gave him life. The servant during the week performed all the heavy household duties: he chopped the wood, carried water from the well, swept the courtyard and the lane. On the Sabbath day he had to rest. His master, on the eve of the Sabbath, removed the "Shem" from his mouth and the Golem lay lifeless. Once the Rabbi forgot to do this. The Golem started to throw about everything in the house, ran out into the street, broke windows and shutters, threw stones, threatened the people, and seemed intent on destroying everything. People ran into the "Altneu" Synagogue to fetch the Rabbi. The congregation was just about to usher in the Sabbath and on the Sabbath it was forbidden to take the life of any being. The Sabbath Psalm, which precedes the evening prayer, had been sung. The Rabbi interrupted the service, ran out, caught hold of the Golem and tore the "Shem" out of his mouth. The Golem collapsed. The Rabbi then returned to the Synagogue and ordered the Sabbath Psalm to be repeated before proceeding with the interrupted service. Since then it has become the custom in the "Altneu" Synagogue to sing the Sabbath Psalm twice. The Rabbi did not wish to expose the community again to the danger from the Golem and did not revive him. The remains of the Golem were deposited in the loft of the "Altneu" Synagogue.

The "Sippurim" makes no mention of the custom of that Synagogue to repeat the Sabbath Psalm. But Prague tradition traces the custom, the real origin of which is

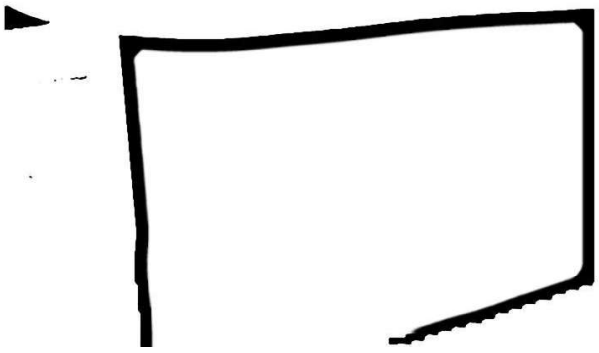
unknown, back to the legend. People also continued to believe that the remains of the Golem could be found in the loft of the Synagogue, as is shown by an editorial note to the 1864 reprint of the Perles family chronicles. This states that the editor had personally heard from the Lemberg Rabbi, Joseph Saul Nathanson, who was then still alive and whose rabbinical judgments are still valued today, that during a visit to the Prague "Altneu" Synagogue he had desired to ascend to the loft. The beadle, a very old man, prevented him because the former Chief Rabbi of Prague, the famous Ezechiel Landau, had forbidden any search for the remains of the Golem. Landau himself, so the beadle told Nathanson, once wanted to search for the remains. He fasted for a day, bathed, put on Tallith and Tephillin, and ascended to the loft. When he returned he only said that from now on no one should enter that room any more. The old beadle may still have had a personal recollection of Ezechiel Landau, who died in 1793, but the prohibition in any case gives the impression of a regular tradition which remained alive in Prague. During Landau's lifetime the Prague legend of the Golem must already have taken strong root. Landau came to Prague in 1755, and it seems likely therefore that the legend arose between 1730 and 1740.

These historical considerations clearly show how far removed are the legends from the actual personality of the man whose character and thoughts have been depicted above in their true form. Nevertheless we continue to feel something of the magic charm cast by the later legends on the reality of long ago, which proves its genuineness by its hold on the people's memory.

Extracts from the Works of the Great Rabbi Loew

Note.—The following extracts from the works of the Great Rabbi Loew are complete in themselves and illustrate, as a whole, the various trends of his thought. The translations from the Hebrew are somewhat abbreviated but otherwise keep close to the original text. Explanatory notes and references are added in brackets.

THE CREATION OF THE MESSIAH
THE DANCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS
THE ENVELOPMENT
GOD'S TEARS
GOD PRAYS
ON MAGIC
RELIGIOUS LAWS OR MORAL PRECEPTS
THE SABBATH
WHY THE TORAH DOES NOT MENTION THE WORLD TO COME
TIME AND HOUR
KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION
THE WRITING ON THE TABLETS
HUMILITY
PHARAOH'S HARDENED HEART
ISRAEL'S DISAPORA AMONGST THE NATIONS
THE CHAIN
THE MESSIANIC DAYS



The Creation of the Messiah

(Be'er Hagolah, part 5)

Commenting on the verse, "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis i, 2), Rash Lakish remarks that this means the spirit of the Messiah.

Several questions are put against this sentence. Why and what for did God create the Messiah in the first six days of the creation? Or how is it possible that he was already created? What are his actions until the day when he will arise?—may this be in our days!

In the Torah an answer to the first question is already indicated. God would not have troubled about the world if He had not had a definite object in view for it. For if an artisan does some work without a definite aim, he does not deserve the name of artisan. God's intention with the world is expressed by the verse: "The Lord hath made all things for Himself" (Proverbs xvi, 4).

Our sages explain this as follows: All that He created in the world, He did for His own glory, as it is written "Even everyone that is called by My name: for I have created him for My glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him" (Is. xliii, 7, and Ethics of the Fathers, chap. vi). Thus the creation of the world is His glory. But only at the time of the Messiah, not as it is today. "The Lord shall be King over all the earth; in that day one shall be the Lord and His name one." Then only everything will be to His glory and He shall be King above all. But since at the beginning of the creation He had in view its ultimate aim, the world must finally be

ready for the coming of the Messiah. Man is the reas for all things created in the world, but the reason for whole world is the Messiah. Therefore in the record the creation of the world the spirit of the Messiah is indicated. The spirit of the Messiah is the Spirit of Gc and therefore after mentioning the creation of the heave. and the earth it says that "the Spirit of God moved up the face of the waters". This was the completion heaven and earth and the aim of the creation.

There is another remarkable point: Man, the mc complicated being, was created last of all. The spiri the Messiah on the other hand is something entirel immaterial, and even if he possesses a body, the spi remains separated from it, because his spirit is immateri and not complex. Therefore his spirit was created befor all else.

The Dance of the Righteous

(Be'er Hagolah, part 4)

In the last paragraph of the Talmudic tractate Taanit the following statement is made in the name of Rabl Eleazar: A time will come when God will arrange dance for the righteous in paradise. He will sit in thei midst and everyone will point a finger at Him, as it written: "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him and He will save us; this is the Lord: we have waited Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation (Is. xxv, 9).

People point to this statement and say that it is agains all reason to suppose that there could be young maiden and men dancing in a holy place like the world to come detached as it is from everything material. One must,

however, understand that those words are meant to reveal a great blessing reserved for the righteous, and that deep wisdom is contained in this saying.

The dance is specially suitable for young maidens, as it is written: "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together" (Jer. xxxi, 13). The dance is joy expressed through action, not joy remaining in the heart. Women, and especially young maidens, are less thoughtful than men, and thought keeps back the full expression of joy. Since one day joy will find pure expression in paradise, joy itself is called the dance of the righteous. This will be the joy in God, as it is written: "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous" (Ps. xcvii, 12). Therefore it is said that God will sit in their midst and everyone will point a finger at Him. This means that the righteous have no other joy except in God. He is the perfection of themselves. So far there is a simple explanation of the words of the sages.

But one must understand also what really is meant by the dance. Joy is something psychical, it is the expression of a perfection in man which belongs only to the soul but not to the material body. The body has only potential power, but no independence. Without this there is no perfection. The body is kept down by the weight of nature, it is oppressed. When therefore a man dances he experiences a greater joy, because he feels the perfection of the soul as power. Therefore it is said that God arranges a dance of the righteous in paradise, because all that is depressing and material is taken from them and only the soul has power. When it is said that God is in their midst, it means that they are freed from the material, which formed a barrier between them and God.

The dance spoken of is not any kind, but a round dance, in a circle. Every circle has a centre, equidistant from any point of the circumference. Therefore it says that God sits in the centre of the righteous, as all points of the circumference are joined to the centre by the radii, turned towards it and attracted by it. And just as the centre is apart from the circumference, so He, the Holy One, remains apart, although in their midst.

The dance has to be a round one, so that no one can say that every righteous person adheres to God in his own manner. As the dance proceeds round and round, every righteous one is joined to God not from one place only, but from all places. Pointing a finger at God means that one points out something that is separate from the rest. The righteous learn to know wherein lies God's oneness and His difference from all else that is. The pointing with the finger is the recognition of this truth.

One can only write little about such mighty matters. The wise one will add to it out of his own wisdom and knowledge. May God forgive us and make us the last participants in this holy dance.

The Envelopment

(Be'er Hagolah, part 4)

Rabbi Yochanan in the Talmudic tractate Rosh-Hashanah (17, b) comments as follows on the verse "And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed" (Ex. xxxiv, 6) (when Moses wished to see the Majesty of God): "If it were not expressly written so in the Torah, one would not dare to pronounce it, for it means

that God covered Himself with the praying-shawl like a cantor and spoke to Moses: Any time that Israel sin before Me, let them do likewise and I shall forgive them."

Many find it difficult to believe that God acts like human beings and covers Himself after the manner of a cantor, but one must consider how our Rabbis arrived at this conclusion. It is written: "And I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee" (Ex. xxxiii, 19). And further on it is written: "And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed" (Ex. xxxiv, 6). This proclamation was to teach Moses what Israel had to do when in need of God's compassion. It referred not to the contents of the prayer itself, but to the form in which the prayer is to be offered.

The question arises, is the form really so important that it was necessary to show it to Moses? The answer is simple. Moses said: "I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory" (Ex. xxxiii, 18), and God answered: "Thou canst not see My face" (ibid., 20) . . . "I will make all My goodness pass before thee and I will proclaim the name of the Lord" (ibid., 19). God Himself explained that it was impossible to see Him, and that one could only cling to His attributes. If man does this, God will also cling to him. Therefore it is written: "Thou shalt see My back parts, but My face shall not be seen" (ibid., 23). Thus God behaves to man as man to God. If man buries himself in his prayer and does not turn away from God, God will not turn away from him.

As to the envelopment with the praying-shawl in the manner of a cantor, this means that there is for one so covered no distraction from the outside. Only then is it possible to call on God with fervour from the bottom of

the heart and in truth. Of course it does not depend on the envelopment with the praying-shawl, but on sincerity and inner devotion. And this is to be understood by envelopment. Hence it is written: "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is enveloped and poureth out his complaint before the Lord" (Ps. cii, 1). Or again: ". . . their soul was enveloped. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble" (Ps. cvii, 5, 6). This is what the sages meant by saying that God enveloped Himself like a cantor and proclaimed the thirteen attributes of His goodness. Here again we see that the sages spoke of the inner meaning of things. But usually people, with their material way of thinking, do not understand the words of the sages, which mean something spiritual and immaterial.

God's Tears

(Be'er Hagolah, part 4)

In the Talmudic tractate Berachoth (59a) we find the following passage: When God remembers His children who live in misery amongst the nations, He drops two tears into the great sea, and the sound is heard from one end of the world to the other: that is the earthquake.

Strong objection can be taken to this passage. One can scarcely assume that words relating to the Creator of all express a defect in Him. But such would be the case here. Perfection is joy and bliss, but those words imply a suffering which it is impossible to attribute to God. Further, before Israel was dispersed amongst the nations, earthquakes also occurred. There is nothing new under the sun, and the world goes on in its usual way.

But here also the words of the wise are correct and

there is nothing in them that does not make good sense. The words do not refer to nature, although of course it is nature that produces earthquakes, as explained by books on physics. Only the sages did not have nature in mind. Even if nature acts, the action is caused by God. So it is with everything created. God acts through nature. The sun shines on the earth, but this action has been ordained. This is the great basis on which belief is founded. Only in this sense did our teachers seek to convey knowledge to the people. The scholars, on the other hand, when pondering over such phenomena as earthquakes, thunderstorms, etc., attribute everything to nature, without regard to the Creator of all. The sages of Israel, however, knew already from Moses that it is not so, and by oral tradition they received the blessings to be recited over those phenomena. Nature is God's messenger, and such events as earthquakes depend on changes and defects in the world. When Israel, God's first-born, His son, is under the dominion of strange nations, it is as if some existence had come to an end. Nothing that is acting independently can be subject to something else. Israel therefore is to be regarded as if it were not in the world at all, and God's tears refer to this cessation of existence, like weeping over the dead. All this denotes a special praise of God—as viewed of course from the side of the recipient. For our sages have always said that God reveals Himself to those who perceive Him according to their ability of perception. They have extracted this remarkable secret from the innermost meaning of the Haggadic tales.

God Prays

(Be'er Hagolah, part 4)

We read in the Talmudic tractate Berachoth (7a): "Rabbi Yochanan asked in the name of Rabbi Yose: From where do we take it that God prays? He answers the question himself. It is written: 'Even them will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in the house of my prayer' (Isaiah lvi, 7). Not in the house of *their* prayer, but in the house of *My* prayer. Thus God does pray. But what does He pray? Zutra ben Tobia answers this in the name of Rab: May it be My will that My mercy overcome My wrath, that mercy cover My severe judgment, so that I may deal with My children with mercy and not according to the strict demands of justice."

This passage is sharply attacked. Whom is God to pray to, seeing there is no one like Him and He is almighty? Do not the Rabbis teach us in the prescribed morning and evening prayers about the unity and omnipotence of God, and must one assume—which God forbid—that something else may have entered their minds?

The answer can only be conjectured, because our knowledge is so far removed from theirs. They knew the hidden meaning of wisdom and prayer, and what prayer meant. The (Hebrew) word for prayer, "Tephillah" is derived from a root which means "thinking" (Heb.: "pillel"), *e.g.* "And Israel said unto Joseph: I had not thought (*pillalti*) to see thy face" (Gen. xlviii, 11). From this root is also derived the word "Tephillin" (Phylacteries), because they are a sign of remembrance,

and they are placed against the forehead, because the head is the seat of thought. Likewise they are placed on the arm next to the heart, because the heart, the seat of the will, should be turned to God. Praying thus means to wish that God may do something according to one's will and thought. Therefore it is said that God prays, because He, the truly good and merciful, has pleasure in thinking of mercy and desiring the good.

On Magic

(Be'er Hagolah, part 2)

According to tractate Sanhedrin, part 7, magic is punishable by death; but he who only creates optical delusions, although this is likewise forbidden, has committed no capital crime. There is also a form of magic which is permitted, like the one which Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Oshaya practised when on the eve of every Sabbath, after studying the book *Yetzirah*, about the creation of the world, they created a three-year-old calf and ate it.

Seeing that the tractate speaks of three forms of magic, there are some who say that what those two Rabbis did was also magic and that therefore magic was permitted. Such a thought—God forbid—never entered the minds of the sages. They explained the word magic as a denial of the heavenly host, whose decrees from above regarding the earth are altered and changed by it. For the earth is controlled by the beings of the world above. Therefore anyone who nullifies the decrees of the upper beings, even by means of the divine name, is a magician. The words quoted show that in that case a permitted form of magic was meant, not real magic. It was not a

natural thing and therefore it was called by the name of magic. The study of the book *Yetzirah* and the creation of a three-year-old calf is definitely permitted. The order of the world makes it possible that God suspends the decrees of the upper beings, as He is above them. The sages explain that God is called "Shaddai" because He destroys (Hebrew: "Shoded") the ranks of the upper host. The use of the book *Yetzirah*, which contains the names of God, with which He created the world, is just the same as a prayer, as this also annuls the evil impending over the world.

Even natural things can be altered through the name of God, as He has power to change their nature without altering the order of the world. The wise men of Israel had a tradition that Moses divided the sea by means of God's name composed of 72 letters. The three verses which report this each contains 72 letters. In the name of God consisting of 42 letters Elisha cursed the children, of whom just 42 were killed (2 Kings ii, 24). The utterance of the names of God, as set out in the book *Yetzirah* and by which God Himself created the world, does not contradict the order of the creation and was therefore allowed.

Religious Laws or Moral Precepts

(Tiphereth Yisrael, chap. 6)

There are people who examine the moral attitude of man purely from an intellectual, philosophical point of view, and consider it childish to believe that eternal bliss in a world to come, where there is nothing material, can be obtained by the observation of ceremonial laws which

deal with things material. They are still more surprised that not all religious laws affect the moral attributes of the soul, as do for instance the commands to practise benevolence, or the precept "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart" (Lev. xix, 17), or "Neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy brother" (ibid., 16). Only by developing the good qualities of the soul and abstaining from evil can man, according to them, be said to attain eternal bliss. For it is written that God rewards with good those who find goodness in themselves and that he repays the evil-doer with evil. But one tries in vain to find on the basis of such reasoning, which is far from that of the Torah and the sages, a ground for such prohibitions as the one against the wearing of apparel made from a mixture of animal and vegetable substances, or against sowing a field with different seeds, or for precepts about ritual food.

Only those who really know the Torah are able to reveal the secret of wisdom and truth. But the above-mentioned questions do not deserve an answer. It would be different if those who raise these questions, who seek a sufficient reason for everything, were able to show us a proper reason for every common natural manifestations. Even then the difference between the two things would still be very wide, because the natural things are on earth, whilst the Torah is above the heavens, in the uppermost of all worlds. The questioners are unable to give us the faintest reason why a living being has so many veins and members, and why this or that organ is formed in a certain way. It is no use pointing to physicians and scientists who once in a thousand cases find the real cause; and this is no convincing

examines their words. If this is the case with natural matters, how much more does it apply to matters divine and to commands to do or not to do this or that. And if the body and nature of man, which are the basis of his existence in this world, remain impenetrable, and man can become physically perfect only through this nature, how much more is this true of divine activities which lead man to the eternal life, even if we do not know how and why.

We read in the Mishnah (Berachoth V, 3) that if the cantor of a congregation, basing himself on the verse "Thou shalt not take the hen (of the birds) with the young" (Deut. xxii, 6), says aloud "Thy mercy extends to the bird's nest" he is told to be quiet. The Gemara asks (in surprise) what is the reason for this, and cites the answer of two Amoraim. The one is of opinion that this sentence may arouse jealousy amongst God' creatures. The other thinks that mercy is through i presented as an attribute of God, whereas here it is a question of a command.

The first answer means that if God's mercy is shown in particular to the bird's nest, a difference is established between the various creatures. This is not the objection in the case of the second answer, because it is the nature of commands that they refer to some things and not to others. All creatures deserve mercy. Hence the characteristic attribute of God as constant Ruler of the world is not mercy but justice. His commands correspond to His wisdom and are worthy of a King who rules over all in truth and rectitude. Truth, however, does not lie in mercy, because mercy is also shown to those who do not deserve it. If therefore God nevertheless has mercy on

His creatures, still justice remains the chief quality of His permanent rule of the world.

In his *Guide of the Perplexed* (iii, 48) Maimonides gives as the reason for the command about the bird's nest that the Torah wanted to spare the mother bird anguish of soul. How much more (he says), must this apply to man! It might, of course, be objected against him that the cantor is forbidden to recite during prayer the sentence "Thy mercy extends to the bird's nest". This is only according to one of the two opinions about the commands of the Torah, that we have no concern with the reasons for them and they are simply an expression of God's will. He, Maimonides, adheres to the second opinion, that the commandments have in fact a special aim. One cannot help being astonished at this view of Maimonides, seeing that we are dealing with an undisputed opinion of the Amoraim, and one cannot say that the command is not perfectly clear. Hence the whole statement shakes the very fabric of belief.

Nachmanides sees the reason of the command about the bird's nest in preventing man from being cruel. Thus God wanted by it to do man a good turn. It is perhaps not fitting to criticize this great teacher, but I cannot be satisfied with his explanation and feel deeply perturbed by it. Why are there no other commands, as Maimonides himself admits, to develop in us the attribute of mercy? For instance, it is written that one must not kill a cow and her calf on one and the same day. Is it less cruel to kill the one during the day and the other during the night, which is permitted? Again, take the example of the bird's nest. Whilst the mother bird sits upon the young, one must not touch the young, but when the

mother bird flies away, it is permitted to remove the young. Therefore all the reasons mentioned are only forced ideas about divine commands, as if they were a collection of moral precepts. The same applies to the laws about benevolence. It is not as if God did not want to have pity on the poor and therefore ordered us to feed them. Oh, no. Nevertheless, if it were only a question of pity God would know what to do without having to give orders to man.

It seems that what the sages meant is as follows: The laws as revealed to us are not given from the very beginning for the benefit of the receiver, but God issued His orders like a Ruler. It is true that if we fulfil His orders, they are for our good, but the laws are not given to us because mercy is one of God's attributes: He simply ordered us to be merciful and not cruel.

The Sabbath

(Tiphereth Yisrael, chap. 10)

The statement that God rested on the seventh day of the creation means that He created and completed all. The heavens also are in action, but their activity does not bring any completion and therefore they have no rest nor interruption.

One may be surprised at God being linked with the idea of rest, because "The Lord - - - fainteth not, neither is weary" (Is. xl, 28), but one must consider the following: Whoever requires time for his work must finally rest. Of course the creation of the world in time is only as it appears to the recipient, man. For it is impossible that the plants should have appeared at the same moment

that the earth was created, when according to the order of the creation the earth itself was to bring them forth. The same applies to all the other creations, and therefore the time had to be extended. Thus if the time required for the creation of the world is regarded from the human point of view, then also the rest is meant as a human conception. It is as if it were stated that God created everything within the time stated for the sake of the recipient, man, because the latter would faint and grow weary if he were to receive everything at once. Hence the rest on the seventh day.

Why there are six days of work and a seventh day of rest can be explained in the following manner. The world is corporeal, and every body has six different sides, through which it becomes complete, namely above, below, and the extensions to the four quarters of the compass. These sides bound the body, but in every body there is one point set neither to the right nor the left, neither to the front nor to the back, and which has no spatial extension like the six sides, namely, the middle. The middle is not subject to space, therefore it is not corporeal. When God created the corporeal world, He did so in six days corresponding to the six corporeal extensions. The seventh day was the day of rest, corresponding to the incorporeal middle.

The seventh day is holy, because holiness can be attributed only to the incorporeal. When our sages said that on the Sabbath man acquired a special soul, they meant by it that the incorporeal soul increased in strength. Therefore that day is sanctified by the kindling of lights, because light is entirely different from other corporeal objects.

Why the Torah does not Mention the World to Come

(Tiphereth Yisrael, chaps. 57, 58)

Many are shaken in their belief because there is no mention in the Torah of the world to come. For this is the ultimate goal, and if there were no hereafter, then—God forbid—many of the just would be in the same state as sinners.

Some think that this question which is of great importance for mankind, falls within the province of prophecy, but it is not so. The intellect is capable of investigating deeply hidden matters which do not belong to prophecy. When the holy spirit descends on the prophets they proclaim matters within the realm of their experience. They have no power over matters belonging to another experience, another world. Hence the saying: the wise man is to be placed above the prophet. The hereafter is entirely separated from this world and has no connection with it, therefore it is not a subject of prophecy. This prophet is also called seer, beholder, because just as the eye cannot absorb something remote from its perceptive faculty, so the eye of the prophet cannot perceive the world to come, as it is written: "Neither has the eye seen, O God, beside Thee" (Is. lxiv, 4). The prophets announced only matters connected with this world, and therefore they mention nothing about the world to come and the resurrection of the dead.

In the Torah there are only veiled indications regarding this matter.

The Torah desires the perfection of this world, the direction of man's activity towards the good, so that he

may be good in this world and the world may become actually what it ought to be. The world has certainly not been created perfect, seeing that God has put evil inclinations into the world. In order to counteract the evil, God gave the Torah to man, and now the world can become perfect, but it could never attain perfection if this were only possible through the world to come. The here and the hereafter are each a world in itself.

Belief must not be based on something which the senses cannot perceive. If that were not so, then anyone could create a new religion and assert that one could participate in the world to come if only one believed in him. The Torah kept away from this, as if it wanted to say that every true religion must promise only what the senses can perceive.

Time and Hour

(Sermon on the Torah)

The Midrash explains the verse: "To everything there is an hour, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Eccl. iii, 1), by pointing out that for the actions of Noah, Abraham, and Jacob the right hour was indicated, and that only with the revelation of the Torah the time had come for everything under the heaven. Rabbi Bibi says: "The hour had come when that which up till then was above the heaven was to be revealed below the heaven; this was the Torah."

This confirms my view that the (Hebrew) expression "Eth" ("time") is used in connection with abstract matters which do not fall within the province of "Zeman" (the earthly "hour"). Thus the Torah also,

as something supermundane and immaterial, does not belong to the "hour". "Now" (Hebrew "Athah", a derivative of "Eth") is the connecting link between the hours, the goal of those past and the beginning of those ahead. The "now" therefore is a third term which unites the hours and divides them into past and future, but in itself does not belong to the hour. This third term, the connecting link between the two boundaries of the past and of the future, was reserved for the revelation, which took place in the third month, Sivan.

This third month stands under the sign of the Zodiac Gemini (*i.e.* twins), and this is very important for deeper knowledge. It was the right month for the giving of the Torah, the "twin roes" of Israel (cf. Cant. iv, 5). The desert, which is sundered from the material, was the right place for the revelation of the Torah, and so was the time, the third month, which is suitable for the incorporeal, the abstract.

Knowledge and Action

(Sermon on the Commandments)

Torah denotes the Commandments which God gave through Moses. Nevertheless one does not call them Commandments, although this term is very suitable, because they were commanded by God. The fact is that the expression "commandment" applies to an order the recipient of which need not understand its contents and nature, but has merely to carry it out. This was far from God's intention when he gave Israel the commandments. He wanted them thoroughly to understand the commandments, and therefore they are called Torah, a word

connected with Horaah, teaching: it teaches the sense and wisdom of the commandments. If that is so, one could say that the Torah should have been called wisdom, because it is unsurpassed in wisdom. This is proved by the Bible, as it is written: "Behold I have taught you statutes and judgments ... Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding" (Deut. iv, 5, 6). Wisdom alone is thus not God's sole intention with the Torah, it is also meant to teach man what he has to do. This is not so with other sciences, which are not concerned with action, their aim being knowledge by itself. The Torah demands both, to comprehend the wisdom inherent in the commandments and to carry them out on the basis of such knowledge. The expression Torah is applied to them because it unites both = the teaching of the wisdom and the action arising therefrom. Without action there is no Torah.

We read in the Talmudic tractate Yebamoth 109b, that Rabbi Yose says: When someone affirms he does not care about the study of the Torah, it is clear that he gets nothing out of it. But if someone says he devotes himself exclusively to the study of the Torah, he ought logically get out of it as much as the Torah is worth. Still that is not so, as he also gets nothing out of the Torah. Why is this so? Rabbi Papa gives the answer: Scripture expressly demands both learning and doing (Deut. v, 1). He who acts according to the Torah, also learns; he who does not act according to the Torah does not learn either.

It follows that he who does not act according to the Torah does not possess it. Therefore one speaks of Torah and not of wisdom, because one must add to the

wisdom and knowledge that which its wisdom teaches, namely action. The Torah is different from other kinds of wisdom, which man must win out of his own faculties, and which are not given to him direct from God like the Torah. The Torah in itself is not connected with man. It is the supermundane, divine intellect. Man has to make it a reality in himself and unite himself with it through action and knowledge.

The Writing on the Tablets

(Derech Hachayim, part 6)

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says in the Ethics of the Fathers, part 6: "It says, 'The tablets (of Moses, written on both faces) were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the Tablets' (Ex. xxxii, 15, 16). Do not read 'engraved' (Charuth), but 'freedom' (Cheruth), for only he is free who studies the Torah."

This explanation does not seem to have any relation to the text. What connection can there be between God's writing engraved on the tablets and the statement that he who studies the Torah is free? However, here again we have a case where the apparently remote allusions and suggestions of our sages contain something quite out of the ordinary.

This is what is meant. The intellect gives us a picture of the nature of existence and the Torah also reveals such a picture. So does the writing as being the form of the Torah. The lettering and the chiselling of the letters are described as "engraving". Although writing is something material, yet the essential part of writing is its ideal

content, and where it is a question of ideal we are permitted to talk of freedom. Lack of freedom is only to be found in the material, but not in what we call the inner nature, the idea of things. The mark of the unfree is that it is shaped by outside agencies, as is the case with the material. Only the essential, the ideal, which undergoes no alteration, can be described as free. Since the words of the Torah are abstract, totally detached from the material, the writing of them in the form of the signs on the tablets indicates the spiritual in the completely abstract Torah. The signs too are unconnected with the substance. Therefore the term "engraved" (Charuth) is used, not "chiselled", in order to indicate that the Torah is "freedom" (Cheruth).

The writing on the tablets could be seen from both sides, showing that the "chiselling" was perfect on both sides, an ideal form. Generally, when something is chiselled on a tablet, it does not penetrate to the other side. There always remains a part of the substance supporting the engraved writing, it so to speak still clings to the material. But the form of the writing on the tablets, which by its shape points to the spiritual character of the Torah, was something perfect, quite detached from the material on which it was written. The form of the letters was a perfect form, and therefore the writing could be chiselled on both sides. Everything material had been overcome, there was perfect freedom, as there is in the Torah detached from all that is material.

So only he who studies the Torah is free, and even if many who study it are, owing to the fault of others, not their own masters, in a higher and truer sense they are nevertheless really free.

Humility

(Netivoth Olam, Ha'anovah 1)

It is written (Prov. xxii, 4) that "fear of the Lord follows (literally: on the heels of) humility", but it is also written "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. cxi, 10). This is explained as follows. Through wisdom man arrives at the fear of God, as stated by our sages: "The uneducated man cannot be really pious" (Ethics of the Fathers, ii, 5). For through wisdom man perceives that there is a Higher Being and he stands in awe of it. Thus through wisdom one reaches a stage which is higher than wisdom itself, and that is the fear of God. But he who is humble already has the fear of God in him. It is not the same as with wisdom, with which the fear of God does not come simultaneously. There are people full of wisdom but lacking the fear of God. Wisdom is certainly a preparatory step to the fear of God, but it is not so necessarily. Wisdom is like a ladder by which man ascends towards the fear of God, but he may stop on the way up and never reach the rung of the fear of God. But if man is humble and modest, he admits his significance and that is the real fear of God. Of humility one cannot say that it leads to the fear of God, that it is the beginning of it, like wisdom. Rather is humility in itself already fear of God, as the heel is the root of the body.

The difference between humility and the fear of God is this. When man is humble he makes himself like his Creator. Our sages say that God left on one side all the high mountains and made his glory descend on the lowly Sinai. The humble one therefore assumes an

attribute of God, whilst the fear of God, which cannot be an assimilation to God, only means the acknowledgment that God is superior. Thus humility is greater than the fear of God.

The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

(Gevurath Adonai, chap. 31)

Many are worried by the question why God increased the plagues after Pharaoh was ready to give in, and why God then hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he could not obey. It would seem that he was undeservedly punished by the plagues for something of which he was not guilty.

Actually during the first five plagues it was not God who hardened Pharaoh's heart; it was Pharaoh himself, as it is written there every time. Only during the last five plagues did God harden Pharaoh's heart. Of the ten plagues which God brought upon the Egyptians, the first five belong to the world below (changing of water into blood; frogs; lice; a mixture of noxious vermin; pestilence). The remaining five belong to the world above, the heavens (blains, caused by soot cast against the sky; hail; locusts, carried over the land by the east wind; darkness; slaying of the first-born). The five plagues of the lower world (the head of which is man, who even approaches the upper world) had no more power over Pharaoh than the power of man can exercise. He therefore himself hardened his heart. But when the last plagues, those from the upper world, above the power of man, fell upon him, he was ready to allow Israel to depart, not because he felt remorse, but because the plagues were stronger than he.

God does not want to force man to act only through punishment. This is the reason why God hardened the heart of Pharaoh so much that he could resist being forced by the plagues to free Israel. There is something great in this hardening of the heart, countering the plagues, thereby re-establishing the equilibrium (for freedom of decision).

In Midrash Rabba we find the following dictum of Rabbi Simon ben Lakish: "God warned Pharaoh five times, but Pharaoh stiffened his neck and would not give in. I shall, said God, add uncleanliness to your uncleanliness. This is meant by the words 'I shall harden his heart'." There is a deep meaning in this statement attributing to God the adding of uncleanliness to uncleanliness. Conversion belongs to man, whose nature is unsteady and changeable. His actions cannot be regarded as complete. Actions are judged in relation to the doer, who is a corporeal being subject to changes and alterations. He can alter his actions from bad to good, and if he repents, his action is regarded as never having taken place. But if he has been warned, his offence is judged all the more severely, because his action is then complete. God then closes the way to repentance and hardens his heart. Before that God could expect of him that he was ready to change for the better, but now God adds uncleanliness to uncleanliness. These are deep thoughts even if they appear simple. God closes the way to repentance when someone sins intentionally and consciously after having been warned. There can be repentance only for errors which emanate from the corporeal nature of man, but not from his intellect.

Israel's Diaspora amongst the Nations

(Netzach Yisrael, chap. 1)

Good can only be recognized through its opposite, and in fact we understand all things by contrast. Only by looking at black can we understand white. The essential of the final deliverance becomes clear to us only through understanding the exile. In this manner we become conscious of the good and of the salvation for which we hope.

The banishment itself is a clear proof and confirmation of the redemption. There is no doubt that the banishment is an alteration of the proper order of things, according to which God has assigned to each nation its due place. The land of Israel is the allotted place for Israel, whose banishment from it is a complete upsetting of the prescribed order. All things which are removed from their natural place and remain outside of it cannot settle in the, for them, unnatural place and must return to their natural place. If they remained in the unnatural place, it would be equivalent to the unnatural becoming natural. This is just as impossible as if for instance one were to force fire to remain on the earth, when its natural place is above the earth, or force the earth to remain above when its natural place is below. It would be the same as regards the people of Israel, if they were to remain for ever in banishment, which is not their natural place. Their natural place, according to the true order, is the land of Israel, where they should be their own masters, and not under the rule of others. Our sages have laid down the principle that everything has its place and that it must be independent. If Israel remained for

ever in banishment, this would mean its being relegated to somewhere outside its due place, turning the unnatural into natural, which cannot be of long duration. For the nature which God has given to everything safeguards its existence.

And so the diaspora is also not natural. As everything returns to its place, so also will the dispersed and divided parts, in order to constitute a uniform whole. Every thinking person will admit that parts belong to a whole. Why, therefore, should they be separated and not united into a whole? Everything that is dispersed tries to reassemble, and therefore Israel's diaspora amongst the nations is contrary to nature. Granting that Israel has sinned, yet the dispersion is only a temporary punishment. It cannot remain so for ever, because nothing that is against the divine order can be permanent.

The true order of things does not permit one nation to be subject to another, to be under its yoke. God creates each nation for itself. If the banishment remained in force and if the other nations remained masters over Israel, it would mean a perpetual alteration of the order of the world, and that is impossible. Therefore we can safely base our hope of deliverance on the banishment.

The sages teach the same lesson in Bereshith Rabba where, commenting on the verse: "And He (God) said to Abram, of a surety know" (Gen. xv, 13) they say: "'Of a surety' means that I shall disperse them; 'know', that I shall gather them together again; 'of a surety' means that I shall pledge them; 'know' that I shall redeem them; 'of a surety' means that I shall enslave them; 'know' that I shall free them." All this is hardly necessary; it would have been enough to state the essential point, "'Of a surety' means that I shall enslave them, 'know', that I shall free them." The sages, however, wanted to make it quite clear that the two expressions "of a surety" and "know" referred to the banishment and redemption—"of a surety" to the banishment, "know", which is in the future tense, to the redemption some day.

It is written in Jeremiah (xxxi, 15–16): "Thus says the Lord: A voice was heard in Ramah . . . . Rachel weeping for her children, she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not. Thus says the Lord: Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, says the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, says the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border." Rachel, our sages say, was the mother in the house of Jacob; she kept together all the members of the household. This merit of Rachel, this strength which keeps Israel together, will bring about the return of Israel from banishment. There is a power of unity in Israel in their exile, and this uniting force will lead them back to their home. This is what we wanted to bring out.

The Chain

(Netzach Yisrael, chap. 10)

When one considers what has befallen God's people, worse than any other in the world, what sufferings they have had to bear, how they have sunk lower than the dust, one might be led to the conclusion that God has perhaps forsaken His people and that they mean less to

Him than any other. Such thoughts should be kept far from the mind. Knowledge and reason compel us to believe that this is not so. Our instinct rebels against such a belief, and neither Moses, the trustworthy servant of God, nor His other servants, the prophets, testify to anything of the kind.

Our reason tells us clearly that multiplicity can only develop from unity, and not the other way round. How otherwise could the multiplicity of the world arise out of the unity of God? There must, therefore, also have been a single first-existing people, to which the mass of the other peoples attached themselves. Otherwise one would be justified in doubting whether plurality could have arisen from oneness, the first cause. As it is written: "Israel was holiness unto the Lord and the firstfruits of his increase" (Jer. ii, 3). The word "holiness" is used, because it is an attribute of God. Israel was the first people to whom the Torah was given by God, and only through the Torah it became a unified nation. Other nations also have their moral religions, which may embody much that is valuable, but Israel was the first nation that belonged to the one God. How can one say that this attribute of Israel could be annulled and that Israel no longer belongs to God?

Again, if Israel, before it belonged to God, had been the same as the other nations, one could say that God later on renounced it. But Israel was not at all a nation before it came out of Egypt, as it is written: "And he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and became there a nation" (Deut. xxvi, 5). Israel became a nation because it belonged to God. Whilst Israel remained in Egypt it was not really existing. Israel

was created as a nation through its adherence to God, and it cannot exist unless God's name is associated with it.

In all its exiles God remains with Israel, and when it returns, God will be with it. This union cannot be severed.

In the tractate Taanith (2nd section, Halachah 6) of the Jerusalem Talmud, Resh Lakish says in the name of Rabbi Yannai: "God (El) has associated His holy name with the name of Isra-el." This can be made clear by a parable. A king possessed a small key to his palace. "If I leave the key as it is," the king said, "it will get lost. I shall add a chain to it, which will pull it back to me, if it is in danger of being lost." So it is with God. "If I leave Israel to themselves," He says, "they will be lost amongst the nations. Therefore I join my great name to them." So far the Talmud. This world is the kingly palace and Israel is the key thereto. Without Israel the palace would remain closed and of no use, as there would be no way to enter it. Israel, the small nation, is the key to the great palace. But if Israel were left as it is, it would be lost amongst the nations. Israel is different from all the other nations, it is a peculiar people. For this reason the nations rise against it and try completely to overwhelm it in its exile and to crush it. So God joined His name to it, to bind it to Him. This is the chain which keeps them from getting lost.

In the tractate Berachoth (8a) Rabbi Nathan says: It is written "He has delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me" (Ps. lv, 19). God here says: he who studies the Torah and devotes himself to charity, and he who prays with the community, to some extent liberates Me and My children from amongst the nations.

The sages meant by this that when Israel gathers round God in order to pray, it steps out of its diaspora amongst the nations. It throws off the authority of the nations and rises towards God within their midst. This is called liberation in the midst of nations. Also by actions of charity Israel can rise above the other nations, as it is clearly written: "Righteousness exalteth a nation" (Prov. xiv, 34), or again: "He that walketh righteously . . . he shall dwell on high" (Is. xxxiii, 15–16). This was also an attribute of Abraham, who through his love of his fellow-men rose above all men, and whose name therefore was changed from Abram to Abraham ("For a father of many nations have I made thee"—Gen. xvii, 5). But the highest elevation above the rule of other nations lies in the study of the Torah, because the Torah itself is elevated above all. These three ways lead man on step by step, until he throws off the dominion of the nations and so to some extent liberates God, who is with Israel in all its exiles, and His children.

The Messianic Days

(Netzach Yisrael, chap. 42)

Perfection lies in the aim and end of a thing more than in anything else. The beginning as such has no perfection, because it is not completed. So the aim of time within the days of the world is necessarily directed towards a certain perfection and this is what we call the messianic days and the end of time.

Now the world is corporeal, whilst everything connected with the Messiah is divine, incorporeal. Still, the days of the Messiah are an entity, and are therefore

called the end of the world, an end which is destined to be divine. As with man so it is with the world: during the essential part of his life man is not divine, but towards the end of his days his bodily strength abates, until he becomes divine. So the world also, in the messianic days, will become divine; man will pursue not material things but things divine.

At the end of days the world will therefore be quite different. The essential element in perfection is unity, as it is written: "The Tabernacle shall be one" (Ex. xxvi, 6), that is to say it will be perfect. From this it can be seen that the perfect is one, and the one perfect. Whatever is divided into parts cannot be considered perfect, for the simple reason that a part is still a part and as such lacks unity.

It is written: "In that day the Lord shall be one and His name one" (Zach. xiv, 9). This—God forbid—is not spoken of God as such, for God is one in all eternity; it is said of God as conceived by man. To everything in this world God has given a power of action, be it for good or for evil. Although God is one, the powers of action which originate from Him are divided and that which the beings in this world receive does not emanate from the true name of God. Our world does not know this name, since it belongs to a world entirely different from the corporeal one. It consists of four letters, but it is not pronounced as it is written. The writing points to the true name, but the reading is human. And God and man are divided as by a curtain. But in the world to come God will be called upon only by the one name, which will be the one written.

A Collection of Legends

Note.—The following pages contain a series of legends which formed around the figure of the Great Rabbi Loew. Some of them have already been discussed in relation to their historical and legendary value. They have been collected here again so as to give the reader a better picture of them, and to reproduce the oldest literary treatment of them. Some legends are taken from the *Niphlaoth Hamaharal* by Yüdel Rosenberg, the style of which suits the tone and character of this kind of popular tale unusually well.

THE OLDEST LEGEND

THE GOLEM

THE MAGICIAN

THE BELELES LANE

THE GREAT RABBI LOEW AND THE COUNT

THE BIRTH OF THE MAHARAL

HOW THE GOLEM WAS CREATED

HOW THE GREAT RABBI LOEW MET KING RUDOLF FOR THE FIRST TIME

THE LAST ACCUSATION OF THADDAEUS

THE SERVICES OF THE GOLEM

THE PHYSICIAN'S DAUGHTER

THE CHILDREN OF TWO FRIENDS

WHY THE SCROLL OF THE TORAH FELL TO THE GROUND

THE END OF THE GOLEM

THE REAL MOTIVE OF THE AUDIENCE

THE DEATH OF THE GREAT RABBI LOEW

The Oldest Legend

(From Meir Perles' Family Chronicles, 1727)

The Great Rabbi Loew's only son, Rabbi Bezalel, who died during his father's lifetime, left a son, Samuel. This Samuel reached a very old age, and was also rich and highly esteemed. He became the president of the community of Prague, and was much respected for his knowledge of the Torah and his good deeds. To his grandfather he was like the apple of his eye. Before his death the Gaon (the Great Rabbi Loew) promised Samuel that the grave reserved for his, Samuel's, father would be bequeathed to him. Rabbi Loew had acquired three adjoining burial-places: for himself, his wife, and his only son Bezalel. But as the latter was buried not in Prague, but in Kolin, the grave reserved for him was to pass on to his son.

Samuel died in 415, according to the abbreviated chronology (1655). When he was near his end, all the members of the Burial Brotherhood were assembled round him, and he told them that his grandfather, the Gaon Maharal, had promised him that he was to be buried next to him in the grave originally reserved for his father. The members replied that this was impossible, because the burial place had become so narrow through the erection of the tombstones that a big man of Samuel's build could not be buried there. He thereupon ordered them to prepare the grave whilst he was still alive. If the place was too narrow they should ask the Gaon's forgiveness if they asked him to move aside and make room

next to himself for his grandson, so that his promise could be fulfilled. The members did so and the space grew larger, so that Samuel could easily be buried there. After that the space contracted to its former size, and it was not possible to erect on it a worthy tombstone. There was no room for a wide stone, and a narrow high tombstone was put up.

The fact itself is obvious. The occurrence was entered in the minute book of the Burial Brotherhood, which was burned for our sins in 449 (1689). But the fact is known to all the members of our community, and is related by them.

The Golem

(From a collection of Jewish tales and legends, *Sippurim I* told by L. Weisel (Prague, 1847), who adds a prefatory note: "All the following legends I heard from the old people, and I pass them on to the kind reader just as I have received them.")

During the reign of Rudolf II, there lived amongst the Jews of Prague a certain Bezalel Loew, who, on account of his tall stature and great erudition, was called the Great Rabbi Loew. This Rabbi was well versed in all the arts and sciences, and especially in the Cabbala. Thanks to this art he was able to put life into figures formed from clay and wood, and to make them perform whatever they were told to do, just as if they were real beings. Such self-created servants are worth a great deal; they neither eat nor drink, nor do they require any wages. They work patiently, one can scold them and they do not answer back. Rabbi Loew fashioned such a servant out

of clay, put into his mouth the "Shem" (God's name), and thereby gave him life. This artificial servant did all the rough work in the house throughout the week: he chopped the wood, carried the water, swept the street, and so forth. But on the Sabbath he had to rest; therefore his master, before the Sabbath began, removed the Shem from his mouth and made him lifeless.

It happened once that the Rabbi forgot to do this and the mischief was done. The magic servant went wild, he pulled down houses, threw about lumps of rock, tore out trees by the roots, and played havoc in the streets.

People ran to tell the Rabbi. The situation was indeed awkward. The Sabbath had begun, and all work, whether constructive or destructive, was prohibited. How was one to break the spell?

Fortunately, in the Old-New (Alt-Neu) Synagogue the Sabbath had not yet been sanctified, and as this was the oldest Synagogue in Prague, everyone followed its guidance. There was still time to remove the Shem from the mad creature. The Rabbi ran to the Golem and pulled the Shem from its mouth. The lump of clay fell down and broke into pieces. The Rabbi was greatly upset by this occurrence and was unwilling to create another such dangerous servant. It is said that even today pieces of the Golem can still be seen in the loft of the Old-New Synagogue.

The Magician

(Told by L. Weisel, ibid.)

Once when the Emperor Rudolf and his astrologer, Tycho de Brahe, were about to visit the Rabbi in his

modest house, the Rabbi conjured the whole of the castl of Hradschin (Hradčany, the old royal castle in Prague down into the Jewish lane. The Emperor was highly astonished at this and heaped gold and honours on the magician.

The Emperor once had a strange whim: he wanted to see the Patriarchs and the sons of Jacob and ordered the Rabbi Loew to summon them from their graves. The Rabbi consented, but made the condition that the Emperor must not laugh no matter what he saw. The day and place were fixed and the summoning began in a secluded room of the castle. The patriarchs and the founders of the tribes appeared one after the other in their true form, and the Emperor was astounded at the size and power of these men of the days long gone by; for each of them showed himself with all his attributes. But when the fleet Naphtali skimmed over the ears of corn and stalks of flax, the Emperor could not contain himself and began to laugh. At once the apparitions disappeared and the ceiling of the room began to descend. It would have crushed the Emperor, had not Rabbi Loew arrested it with the help of the Cabbala. It is said that the fallen ceiling can still be seen today in the room, which is kept closed. At least so the story goes amongst the Jewish people.

The Beleles Lane

(From *Sippurim I*)

At the time when the crown of Bohemia rested on the head of Rudolf II, a sudden plague broke out amongst

the Jews of Prague, which carried away only very young children, but spared the grown-ups. Hundreds of corpses were carried daily to the old cemetery and often remained there for days before they could be interred, because there were not enough hands to dig the graves. The distress became greater and greater, there was nothing but grief and lamentation in the community. As the plague ravaged only the Jewish ghetto, it was clear that it was a punishment of God for some unknown transgression amongst the Jews, affecting the whole of the community. Special prayers were recited, fast days were ordained in order to atone for the sin and to entreat God to remove the plague. All Rabbis and Talmudists of Prague gathered together to discuss the matter and to find out the cause of the plague. But no matter how much they exerted themselves, they could not succeed in discovering the real cause.

One of the Rabbis, who on account of his great wisdom and his knowledge of the Talmud, the Cabbala, Astronomy and Astrology was named by the people the Great Rabbi Loew, one night lay on his bed, sadly brooding over the disaster which had befallen the community. He prayed to the Almighty to enlighten his soul, so that the disaster should cease to afflict Israel. Shortly after that he fell asleep.

He dreamt that it was midnight and that the prophet Elijah appeared before him and led him to the cemetery, where he saw the corpses of the children rise from their graves. When the Rabbi awoke he meditated a long time about this dream and came to the conclusion that it was an inspiration of God to direct him to the real cause of the plague.

He sent for one of the most courageous of his disciples and spoke to him as follows:

"God is angry with us, because we have sinned grievously. In order to find out what sin we are guilty of, take heart and go at midnight tonight to the cemetery. When you see the children rise from their graves covered with their white shrouds, pull the shroud off one of them and bring it to me."

About midnight the disciple went to the cemetery and waited there full of uneasy expectation of what would happen. It was a beautiful starlit night. Now and again one could hear the fluttering of a bat or the wind rustling through the leaves of the elder trees.

The disciple might have waited half an hour when the clock of the Jewish town hall struck twelve. At the last stroke life began to stir under the gravestones. Small children, enveloped in white shrouds, rose and began a strange dance, floating above the graves. The disciple shuddered, cold sweat covered his forehead, he was shaking in all his limbs, but he plucked up courage, tore off the shroud from one of the children, and rushed away, fear putting spurs to his heels. Breathlessly he reached the house of the Rabbi, who was sitting at the window watching for his disciple. The latter related to him what had happened and handed him the shroud which he had torn off the child.

Soon after the Rabbi saw the phantom of a naked child floating rapidly towards him. It appeared that when the Rabbi's disciple left the cemetery, the spectres continued their dance until the first stroke of the hour after midnight, when they returned to their graves. Only then did the child notice that it had no shroud, without which it could

not return to the grave. It ran hurriedly to the Rabbi's house, stood before the window, and raised its hands towards him, crying and entreating him:

"Rabbi, give me back the shroud!"

But the Rabbi held the shroud firmly in his hand and said:

"If you want me to return the shroud, you must also do what I want. Tell me the cause of this plague, by which God has smitten us as punishment for our sins."

The child, however, remained silent and would not speak. It repeated its entreaties to the Rabbi to have pity on it. All its companions were at rest, it alone could not return to the grave without the shroud. But in the end, when it saw that the Rabbi remained adamant, it divulged the cause of the plague. In a street not far from the Rabbi, it said, there lived two married couples, who led an immoral life with their wives. This made God so angry that He had launched this plague on the Jewish settlement. The Rabbi then returned the shroud to the child.

When the Rabbi had convinced himself that what the child had told him was true, he saw to it that the two couples who had brought such disaster and misery on the community were duly punished; and the plague thereupon ceased.

The lane where the two couples lived was given by the people the name of "Beleles" Lane, derived from the names of the two wives, Bella and Ella.

The Great Rabbi Loew and the Count

(From *Sippurim I*, told by C. Ludwig Kapper)

During the reign of Rudolf II, Prague was the rendezvous of the foremost men of the time. There lived Tycho de Brahe, Keppler, Longmontanus, Boetius, and others. Not only did the great erudition of the Emperor and his extraordinary love of the sciences attract a great number of alchemists and astrologers of all countries, but his noble example induced many members of the aristocracy of his day to promote the sciences.

There lived not far from Prague a powerful and wealthy Count. He led a secluded life, occupying his days only with the study of astrology and alchemy. He was attracted by the Great Rabbi Loew, the seeker after truth, and often invited him to his castle. The Rabbi likewise was fond of associating with the Count as a man well versed in secret sciences.

One day, after they had been discussing learned matters for several hours and the Rabbi made ready to return to Prague, the Count said: "How is it, Rabbi, that you can find room in your house for your more than four hundred disciples? As far as I know you have only a very small house with two rooms."

"Count," answered the Rabbi, "there would be room if their number were doubled, even trebled. If you wish to convince yourself that my words are true, I am prepared to invite you to dine with me and all my pupils, along with as many of your friends and servants as you care to bring with you. I would only ask you to let me know when I may have the honour."

The Count accepted the invitation and fixed the day, and the Rabbi returned to Prague.

On the appointed day the Count arrived accompanied by several of his friends who, like him, were seeking the Philosophers' Stone, and also by a number of servants. They alighted in front of the Rabbi's modest house, which with its smoke-blackened old walls did not appear very inviting to the Count. He entered and could not believe his eyes. As poor as the house appeared from the outside, so magnificent and amazing it was from within; wherever one looked one saw the most perfect symmetry and extraordinary splendour on all sides. The house seemed to consist of many wings.

The broad staircase was covered with rich carpets and the walls were adorned with paintings which were a delight to the eye. The ante-room led into a large number of apartments, all full of luxury and splendour. The Count and his friends were greatly astonished at the Rabbi's artistic taste. When dinner was announced, the doors of the dining-room flew open as if directed by an invisible power. In the room was a long table set with the finest of plate. Instead of glasses there were golden cups and the fragrant dishes were served from high silver bowls. The count and his friends were amazed at the immense wealth spread before them and had to admit in whispers that the plate was in no way inferior to that of the mighty Emperor.

They sat down to dinner, and during the meal the Count gave his valet a sign, which the latter took to mean that he should appropriate one of the golden cups.

After the meal the guests rose, and left the house with

loud praises for their host and many expressions of delight and satisfaction.

Shortly after this event the Count received the strange news that one day a castle about two hundred miles from Prague had suddenly disappeared with all its valuable art treasures, but the next day had reappeared in its old place. Fortunately none of the valuables was missing, except one golden cup. The Count remembered at once the meal with the Rabbi and the order which he had given his valet. "I see that I was not wrong in my suppositions," he said, "the Rabbi seems well versed in the secret science of the Cabbala. I have been striving in vain for many years to master this science. How necessary and useful it would be for me in my dealings with the Emperor, who would become indebted to me for life."

He hurriedly sent for the Rabbi and said to him: "It is clear to me now that you are well versed in the Cabbala, which hitherto you have been trying to deny. Why have you kept it from me?"

The Rabbi replied: "It is written: Thou shalt not boast of thy riches for they are transitory and vain."

The Count said: "I will tell you why I have asked you to come here. I want you to initiate me into this lofty science."

The Great Rabbi Loew recoiled in terror: "It is impossible, Count, I must not do it. Do not insist, it is useless."

"You must not? Why? Who can hinder you?"

"I wish you would learn to understand," said the difficulties connected with the

pursuit of this science for a Jew. How much greater must be the obstacles for a non-Jew."

"Is that all that prevents you? You shall act as my teacher," the Count called out peremptorily, "there must be no excuse."

"Once more, Count, it cannot be."

"You must, I shall force you. I am in great favour with the Emperor and I shall exercise all my influence in order to destroy you and your family. You know it only requires the least accusation from me."

The Rabbi could not utter a word. Beads of sweat covered his forehead. At last he said: "I shall do as you command, but you must have patience. I have a friend, Rabbi Don Abraham, a colleague of mine in the lofty science. He lives in Spain. Have patience until I summon him here. He shall help me to solve the difficult task."

"Be it so," said the Count, now mollified, "I shall see you soon again."

The Rabbi returned home plunged in thought. He retired to his room and pondered for a long time, what best to do in this difficult position. Should he really write to this fellow-student, Rabbi Don Abraham? What would he say when he heard that he had undertaken the long journey for no other purpose than to teach the Cabbala to a non-Jewish Count? And if he refused to teach the Count, what would be the dire consequences of this refusal for the Rabbi and the community?

The evening was approaching when Rabbi Loew pulled himself together and got ready to hurry to the Synagogue, as it was Friday. Suddenly a strange man

entered the room, ran to the Rabbi, and threw his arms round him. The Rabbi could not believe his eyes. He looked again and again at the stranger and suddenly he recognized his old friend from Saragossa, Rabbi Don Abraham.

"How do you come here? What brings you to me? You appear just at the right moment. But first we shall both greet the Sabbath and then you shall tell me all about it."

After returning from the Synagogue Rabbi Don Abraham said: "You need not tell me in what trouble you find yourself. Just for that reason I have undertaken the journey. Listen. I saw in a dream all that you had gone through in such a short time. I immediately resolved to come to you. The journey took less than twelve hours. A higher power has conducted me here. Be of good cheer, everything will turn out well."

On Sunday the Rabbi sent a messenger to the Count informing him that he would be with him on Tuesday and start the lessons. At the same time he requested him to arrange a secret room for this purpose.

On the appointed day the two Rabbis proceeded to the Count's castle. The Great Rabbi Loew introduced Rabbi Abraham as his friend and future co-teacher. Rabbi Don Abraham bowed and said: "You will forgive me, Count, if I dare to say a few words before we start with the study itself."

"Not here," said the Count, highly pleased, "let us go to the room which I have prepared in the underground vaults."

Silently they descended thither. The room which they entered was of a peculiar character. The Count had

taken great pains to fit it out in a very solemn style. The walls were draped with black cloth and there was something mysterious in its gloomy appearance, like the subject which was to be taught there. A single lamp at the side threw a dim light on the three figures, who stood silent and motionless, like tombstones.

An uneasy, foreboding stillness spread over the room, like the wings of a black raven. Only soft breathing could be heard.

At last Rabbi Don Abraham broke the dismal silence. "One word more before we start. The Cabbala, Count, has its roots deep in the true belief in a supreme, sole being. It can only exist together with religion, not without it. Therefore it is practised only by God-fearing people, free from evil deeds. He who desires to lift the veil of the mysteries and look into the future freely and without fear, must also be able to look back into the past with a free and untroubled mind. Think it well over: Are you free of all guilt? But why should I ask, of course you are."

"I am," exclaimed the Count.

"Then look behind you," continued Rabbi Abraham, "look behind you!" The Count looked round and recoiled three steps. He managed to stammer: "What do I see? A woman with a child in her arms! How she stares out of the dark! O Lord, have pity on me."

"Do you know these?" asked the Rabbi.

"O God, it is my sister and her child."

The phantom disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. Then the Rabbi said in a solemn tone: "You are guilty; it was your sister and her child. Your child also. Both died through you."

There was silence whilst the Count stood as if turned to stone. Then he said softly: "You know my guilt. God alone who reigns above us knows how you recognized it. But I know also that you will be silent, although the evil deed is not silent in me. As to the Cabbala, I must not pursue it, as I know that I am not worthy of it. Only now, Rabbi, do I understand your words: 'the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him' (Ps. xxv, 14). To ordinary people the injunction applies: 'Do not strive after the unattainable and do not search after the hidden' (Talmudic Tractate Chagigah 13)."

They went up the steps again. After a long talk the Count dismissed them and the two Rabbis returned to Prague, greatly moved.

The Birth of the Maharal

(From *The Miracles of the Maharal*, edited (in Hebrew) by J. Rosenberg, Warsaw, 1909)

The great, the holy Maharal, was born in Worms in the year 5273 from the creation of the world (1513). It happened on the night of the Passover, whilst the Seder meal was being taken. His father, Rabbi Bezalel, was a very religious man. Already the birth of the Maharal brought help and deliverance to the people. The Jews at that time were suffering persecution at the hands of the Christian nations. They were accused of using the blood of Christians when preparing the Matzoth for the Passover festival. Scarcely one Passover in the Austrian and Hungarian lands passed without the body of a dead Christian child being discovered in a hidden spot belonging to a rich Jew, where it had been thrown so that the

man might be accused of killing the child in order to use its blood for ritual purposes. So it also happened in Worms. On that Passover night the ritual accusation against the father of the Maharal, Rabbi Bezalel, was being secretly prepared. This is how it happened:

A Christian, carrying a dead child in a sack, crept along the Ghetto, with the intention of throwing the body into the cellar of the Rabbi's house through a small window. As the people were sitting down to the Seder on the first night of the Passover, the wife of Bezalel was suddenly seized with labour pains. There was excitement in the house and some people ran out hurriedly to fetch the midwife. At that moment the man with the dead child was quite near Rabbi Bezalel's house. When he saw the people running excitedly towards him, he was sure that they intended to seize him. He turned and ran back thoroughly frightened into the Christian part of the town. The guards, seeing a man running with a sack and behind him the people from Bezalel's house, thought that a thief was being chased. They caught the man, searched the sack, and brought the miscreant before their commandant, whereupon he confessed his evil design.

The report of this deliverance immediately spread through the whole town. Rabbi Bezalel prophesied of his newborn son that he would comfort us and free us from the ritual accusation. And he named him Yehudah Loew, as it is written: "Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up" (Gen. xlix, 9).

How the Golem Was Created

(Ibid.)

Yitzchak ben Simson Cohen, the son-in-law of the Great Rabbi Loew, relates as follows:

The Maharal prayed that he might be told in a dream how to fight against the ritual accusation. He received from the heavens a reply in ten words, the initial letters of which corresponded to the sequence of the Hebrew alphabet: create an image (Golem) out of clay and you shall destroy the evil design of those who want to tear Israel to pieces. The Maharal was convinced that from those ten letters words could be formed which would enable a living Golem to be created out of clay.

The Maharal secretly called me and his oldest pupil Jacob ben Chayim Sasson Levy, told us of the heavenly answer which he had prayed for, and disclosed to us the secret, how to create the Golem from clay and dust. We had to be his assistants, because such a creation required the power of the four elements, fire, air, water, and earth. He himself, he said, had been created by the power of the element air (spirit), I by the power of fire, and his pupil by the power of water. We three, therefore, could complete the creation of the Golem out of earth. We were enjoined not to divulge the secret to anyone and he gave us strict instructions how to behave during the week preceding the creation.

In the year 5340 (1580), on the 20 Adar the three of us went out of Prague at four o'clock in the morning to the river Moldavka. On its bank we found a spot containing sticky clay. We made out of it a human form, three ells long, with face, hands, and feet, and it lay there

like a man on his back. We then stood at the Golem's feet, our faces turned to its face. The Maharal ordered me first of all to walk seven times round the clay form, from right to left, starting from the head towards the feet. I had to recite a formula which he had taught me. When I finished the body was glowing red like fire. After that the pupil had to walk round seven times, pronouncing a different formula. When he had finished the fire became extinguished, because water entered the body and issued as steam. Then the body became covered with hair, like a man of thirty, and the tips of the fingers and toes with nails. Now the Maharal himself performed the seven circuits and the three of us pronounced simultaneously the verse: "And the Lord God . . . breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living creature" (Gen. ii, 7).

The Golem opened his eyes and looked at us with wonder. The Maharal called in a loud voice: "Stand on your feet." The Golem rose and stood at once on his feet. We dressed him in the clothes which we had brought with us and which were suitable for a servant of the Synagogue. We also put shoes on his feet, so that he looked exactly like a man. He saw, heard, and understood everything, but he did not have the power of speech.

Towards six o'clock, before the dawn, we returned home, the four of us. On the way the Maharal told the Golem: "Know that we have created you out of the dust of the earth in order that you may liberate the Jews from all the misery and sufferings which they have to endure from their enemies and oppressors. You will be called Joseph. You shall stay with me and live in my

court-room, where your duties will be those of an usher You must fulfil all my commands, even to walk through fire, to descend into deep waters, or jump from a tower until you have carried out my orders, no matter where I send you." The Golem inclined his head to show that he agreed.

The Maharal told us that he had named him Joseph because he was a kind of continuation of the being mentioned in the Talmud, Joseph Seda, half man, half spirit, who served the Talmudic sages and often delivered them from great danger. To the members of his household the Maharal explained that he had met this poor dumb man in the street, had noticed his great simplicity, and had taken him into the house out of pity, to be of service to him in his court-room.

The Golem always sat in a corner of the court room, at the edge of the table, his head resting on his hands, just like a vessel of clay, without any mind, without any thought about anything. People called him "Dumb Yossel", or "Yossel the Clay", which means the same as "Yossel the Golem".

How the Great Rabbi Loew met King Rudolf for the First Time

(From *Old Tales from Bohemia*, by Alois Jirásek, 1851–1930)

The fame of the Great Rabbi Loew had also penetrated to the castle of the Holy Wenceslas, the court of King Rudolf, whose court astronomer Tycho de Brahe also greatly esteemed the learned Yehudah Loew. The King himself got to know him in a remarkable manner.

He once rode in his state carriage from the Hradcany (the Castle of Prague) to the Old Town, accompanied by courtiers on horseback. This happened at the time when the King had ordered all Jews to leave Prague. Rabbi Loew had gone to the Court in order to plead for his co-religionists, but he did not succeed, because he was not allowed to see the King. He now waited in the middle of the stone bridge, as he had received reliable information that the King would pass there.

When the people saw the magnificent royal carriage, drawn by four splendid horses in shining harness, approach the bridge together with the imposing suite on horseback, they called to the Rabbi to get out of the way. But the Rabbi remained standing, as if he had heard nothing, right in the way of the royal carriage.

The people started to shout at him and to throw stones and dirt. But it was flowers that fell on him, on his coat and head and at his feet.

At that moment the royal procession arrived, but the Rabbi did not move a step. The horses, instead of running over him, stopped of their own accord, without being reined in by the coachman.

Only then did the Rabbi move and step forward towards the carriage, bareheaded and covered with roses and other flowers. He knelt down and asked the King to extend mercy to his co-religionists. The King, surprised at the Rabbi's approach and all that had happened, ordered him to come to the castle. This was indeed a great favour.

At the royal residence the Rabbi succeeded in his plea. The Jews were not exiled, and from then on Rabbi Loew was often invited to the Royal castle.

The Last Accusation of Thaddaeus

(From *The Miracles of the Maharal*, ed. by J. Rosenberg)

There stood in Prague, opposite the Great Synagogue, a high, very old building, in appearance like a former royal castle. It was called the Palace of Five, because it had five sides and each of the five walls had an entrance in a different street. Against each wall there stood five high pillars made from heavy hewn stones and between them were fixed five large wide windows. The building belonged to the State, but as no money was allowed for repairs, it became more and more dilapidated. It was inhabited mostly by poor people and small artisans. Underneath the building there were vast cellars, like caves. The inmates were afraid to go down to the cellars, because of rumours that goats were dancing about there and that spirits had taken possession of the rooms. If anyone started to go down, it was said that they frightened him away by throwing stones and raising a tempest. Thus the number of residents also grew less and less and the building looked like an old ruin.

One evening, the one preceding the festival of Passover, the following incident happened. The Great Rabbi Loew had searched all the rooms for leaven in the prescribed manner and was about to recite the formula: "All manner of leaven that is in my premises, etc.," when suddenly the candle carried by his old servant Abraham Chayim blew out. The Maharal, who was always particular that prayers should not be recited by heart but should be read from a book, made a sign to the servant to relight the candle. But it blew out again and

The Rabbi turned pale; he perceived that there was something behind this. The men who were with him also became frightened. The Maharal ordered the servant to face the lamp affixed to the wall and to read aloud the formula from the book. When the servant, somewhat confused and nervous, reached the words "in my premises", he read instead "in the Palace of Five". The Rabbi called out to him and the servant repeated the passage, but again read "in the Palace of Five". Then the Rabbi tapped on his middle finger, as he was wont to do when he became aware of something out of the ordinary, and called out: "Now I know that the hour of suffering for our people has struck and that once again they are trying to extinguish the light of Israel. Now also I understand the dream which I dreamt last Sabbath night." He hurried to the lamp, mounted a stool because the lamp was fixed high, and read the formula himself from the book.

He then ordered all to go home at once. There remained with him only his son-in-law, the old servant Abraham Chayim, and Yossel the Golem. The Rabbi told them he had seen in his dream a great flame issuing from the Palace of Five and entering through the window of the Synagogue, just when it was full of worshippers. He had been so startled that he awoke with a scream. Only now did he understand the meaning of the dream. An accusation was being prepared in the Palace of Five, which would bring great trouble to the inhabitants of Prague. It was necessary to clear it away quickly, like the leaven.

The Rabbi inquired of his old servant who were the inmates of the Palace of Five. There was none amongst

them who could be suspected of evil designs. But there was something that frightened the Rabbi. The servant had told him that he had heard when still a child that long ago there had lived in the Palace of Five a King who never showed himself to the townspeople. When he wanted to pray in the church of the "Green Monastery" close by, he made his way there through a subterranean passage built between the cellar of the Palace of Five and that of the monastery. In the monastery at the present time there lived Father Thaddaeus, a great hater of the Jews.

When the Maharal heard this story he said it could be only this priest who, in the seclusion of the cellar of the Palace of Five, had prepared a blood accusation. He undoubtedly knew of the underground passage. The Maharal knew that Father Thaddaeus longed to be revenged on the Jews and especially on him, because he had managed to prevent the baptism of the daughter of one Michael Berger, who had been abducted by Thaddaeus, and to restore her to her parents.

The house of Father Thaddaeus stood in the yard of the "Green Monastery". The windows on one side faced the yard, and on the other side a large garden surrounded by a wall. In the wall there was an iron gate. There also lived in the monastery the servant of the priest with his wife and children. Two weeks before Easter the servant and his wife worked in the garden to put it in order. They opened the gate, in order to carry out the rubbish which had accumulated in the garden. The children meanwhile used to play in the garden or run about in front of the gate. In the evening the parents looked for them and took them back to the house.

Father Thaddaeus took careful note of all this and thought that he could find here a good opportunity to revenge himself on the Jews, and also on the servant, whom he suspected of being an accomplice in the escape of the daughter of the Jew Berger.

One evening Thaddaeus lay in wait for the children of his servant and enticed one of them into his house. He then took it to the large cellar, cut its throat, and caught the blood in a dish. He poured the blood into a number of smaller bottles, and attached to them labels with the names, in Hebrew, of many respected Jews, including that of the Maharal and his son-in-law. He then carried the bottles together with the child's corpse from his cellar to that of the Palace of Five. On the day preceding the Passover Festival he meant to raise an accusation against the Jews, have the Ghetto searched, and cause the heads of the community together with the Great Rabbi Loew to be thrown into prison.

When the parents of the murdered child returned home they looked everywhere for it until midnight, but in vain. The next morning they went to Father Thaddaeus and told him of their search. He thought the child no doubt had run out through the iron gate, in order to play in the field, and had lost its way. Of course, he added, there was one cause of anxiety: it happened to be just before the Jewish Passover festival, at which every year a Christian child was kidnapped, in order that it might be slaughtered and its blood mixed in the Matzoth. It was possible that the child had become a sacrifice of the Jews. He therefore advised them to notify the prefect of the police and demand an immediate search in all the Jewish houses. He himself was prepared to help the police.

The unhappy mother burst into tears and ran at once to the prefect of the police, who promised to do all he could for her, once he had obtained the consent of the Burgomaster. He would attend to this at once and tomorrow morning he would start the search with the help of the military and in the company of the priest. Meantime no one must know anything about it.

The Great Rabbi Loew did not remain inactive either. After midnight he took three thick twisted candles and a flint, gave one each to his two servants, Abraham Chayim and Yossel the Golem, and took one for himself. Very quietly, without being seen by anyone, they proceeded to the cellar of the Palace of Five. On the staircase they lit the three candles and continued their descent. But as soon as they opened the door, they were met by a strong wind, which raised clouds of dust and extinguished the lights. The barking of many dogs could be heard and the servants were frightened. The Maharal told them not to be afraid and to remain quietly where they stood. He and Abraham Chayim recited three times the Psalm "He who dwells under the protection of the Lord". The whirlwind calmed down and the barking of the dogs ceased. But when the three tried to proceed, stones fell from the dilapidated walls and they were afraid lest the rafters should come down on them.

Then the Maharal told Yossel the Golem: "You go alone, because even the evil spirits have no power over you. Search thoroughly all the rooms and if you find anything suspicious, bring it to me." The Maharal and Abraham Chayim retreated to the door and Yossel the Golem went on alone, the lighted candle in his hand.

He looked round and found a basket with the murdered

child, wrapped in a praying-shawl with fringes. Also another small basket with about thirty small bottles filled with blood and bearing labels with the names of the Maharal, the members of his family, and all the distinguished people of the community.

When the Golem brought these to the Maharal, the latter ordered him to take the murdered child, just as he had found it, through the underground passage to the cellar of the monastery, where the priest's wine barrels were kept, and to hide the child there, not letting anyone see him do so. The Golem did exactly as he was told and came back in about half an hour.

Then the Maharal ordered the two servants to dig a hole in the ground of the cellar, break the bottles containing the blood with stones inside the hole, and cover everything with earth and dust so that nothing could be seen.

This done, the three returned home full of good cheer. The Rabbi warned them not to say a word to anyone of what they had been through.

Next morning, the day before the Passover Festival, about ten o'clock, the prefect of police with a large number of guards and soldiers suddenly appeared in the Ghetto. Father Thaddaeus was also there. Two men at a time made a thorough search of every house. When they came near the Palace of Five, Father Thaddaeus told the prefect of the police that one should also search there, because the Jews usually committed these murders in dilapidated buildings. Accordingly all the rooms in the cellar were carefully examined, but nothing was found anywhere, and in the afternoon all withdrew.

During the search the Jews stood trembling for their

lives, but the Maharal ordered everyone to tell his neighbour in his name not to be frightened, because the snare had been broken, and all were saved. They could get ready for the Passover Festival with joy and jubilation. The Rock and Redeemer of Israel had performed secret wonders to save the Jews from the false accusation.

The murdered child lay hidden for several days in the cellar of Father Thaddaeus, until the smell of decomposition became very noticeable. It was shortly before the Christian Easter and Father Thaddaeus ordered his servant to take stock of the wine in the cellar. The servant went down, accompanied by a dog, which sniffed about and began to bark at the place where the corpse of the child was hidden. The servant went to look what was the matter and found the body of his child. Full of horror he ran to the prefect of the police, who sent guards and soldiers to the cellar. The servant cried out that this must be the deed of the priest, who always wanted to attack the Jews and to accuse them of ritual murders. The priest at first tried to deny everything, but his guilt was too evident, and he finally had to confess that he had murdered the child. He was arrested and handed over to the Courts of Justice.

The Services of the Golem

(Ibid.)

The Great Rabbi Loew only used the Golem in order to free the Jews from distress, especially when he had to combat the blood accusation. If the Golem had to be sent to a dangerous place where it was better that he should not be seen, the Rabbi fastened on him an amulet

of buckskin. This made the Golem invisible, whilst he himself could see everything. Every year from Purim till the last days of Passover the Golem had to put on non-Jewish clothes and walk at night through the streets of the city. If he met someone who was carrying a burden, or had a bundle on a cart, he ran to find out what was being carried. If it proved to be a dead child, which was to be thrown into the house of a Jew, the Golem tied the man to the child with a rope and led him by force to the town hall, where he handed him over to the prefect of the police.

The Physician's Daughter

(Ibid.)

There lived in Prague a Jewish physician named Marizi. Although he had little in common with anything Jewish, he still felt that he was a Jew. He had a daughter, fifteen years old, who went her own way and allowed herself to be persuaded to become a Christian. One night, during the Festival of Passover, she ran away from her father's home to the priest Thaddaeus, who was notorious as a great hater of the Jews and knew how to entice Jewish girls to be baptized.

At the same time there was another incident in Prague. A Christian girl, who came from one of the surrounding villages and had been in service in Prague for several years, one night ran away from her employers' house, and no one knew where she had gone. This girl also used to go to the Ghetto in winter in order to kindle the fires in the stoves on the Sabbath. As she had been quarrelling with her Christian employers, the latter

did not worry much when she disappeared, because they supposed that she had returned to her native village. In any case it was not known for certain to which village she belonged.

Father Thaddaeus got to know about this and decided to use the incident as a pretext for a blood accusation against the Jews and especially against the Great Rabbi Loew. The physician's daughter was kept hidden in the monastery and Thaddaeus told her that the Cardinal would visit the monastery chapel that day and celebrate the baptism. She would be asked why she wanted to be baptized and she should then answer that she could no longer endure the cruel customs of the Jews. She was to say that the servants of the Rabbi had brought to her father, shortly before the Passover Festival, a dish full of blood, which was mixed with the dough of the Matzoth, and that her father had paid a lot of money for the blood. She had also heard rumours that the servant girl who had disappeared had become a victim of the Jews.

The Cardinal appeared, put the question in the usual manner, and the girl replied as Thaddaeus had wanted her to do. She only asked that her father should not be cited as a witness, because all Jews stood in great awe of the Rabbi, whom they considered a holy person.

The Cardinal did not in his heart believe in the blood story. Nevertheless he felt himself obliged to draw up a report, which he sent to the court. He also had a copy of it sent to Rabbi Loew. The Rabbi knew that, as usual in such cases, the two servants would be arrested, and that the physician's daughter was not likely to recognize the face of the Golem. There were always crowds of people passing through Prague. Rabbi Loew had a

search made among these for a dumb person, more or less resembling the Golem. He ordered a good night meal, with liquor, to be put before him and made him lie down on the bed of the Golem. The stranger was surprised at the honour shown to him, and he soon fell asleep. Meantime, the Golem was taken to another house, he was given other clothes, and those which he usually wore were placed next to the bed of the dumb person, whose own clothes were hidden.

At midnight guards surrounded the house where the old servant Abraham lived, and arrested him. The same happened to the dumb one who, half asleep, did not notice what clothes he put on.

Next morning there was great excitement in the Ghetto. People were afraid that the Great Rabbi Loew himself might be arrested. No one knew what to do, except to lament and recite Psalms. The legal proceedings were fixed for four weeks ahead and the Rabbi also was summoned.

Meantime, however, the Rabbi was not idle. He inquired particularly after the reason for the servant-girl's quarrel with her employers, and found that four different villages were named as her native place. He sent people out to find her and was greatly upset when they came back after twelve days without having succeeded. That night therefore he called Yossel the Golem, who knew the servant-girl through her work in the Jewish quarter, and ordered him to find her in one of the four places and to hand her a letter, which he had prepared. In this he wrote, in the vernacular, how much her employers regretted the quarrel, and said that they asked her to come back. The Golem also received a

large sum of money in order to hire a carriage with swift horses for the journey there and back.

Two weeks passed and the appointed court day arrived, but Yossel the Golem had not turned up. The Maharal walked about with a heavy heart. He ordered a fast day in the whole of the Ghetto on the eve of the proceedings, and made it known publicly that on the court day itself all Jews should assemble in the Synagogue at sunrise and recite the Psalms with wailing. He himself recited the Psalms aloud in the Great Synagogue and the whole congregation wept with him.

From early morning a great crowd, mostly Christians, had gathered in front of the high building of the Court of Justice. Later the Judges began to arrive at the building. Then Father Thaddaeus came with the physician's daughter in a closed carriage. Finally the two servants of the Rabbi were brought in chained, surrounded by a strong guard. The Great Rabbi Loew, accompanied by the head of the community, Mordechai Maisl, arrived in a splendid carriage.

The President of the Court rang a golden bell as a sign that the proceedings were about to begin. First of all he asked the old servant, Abraham Chayim, if he pleaded guilty to having distributed Christian blood amongst the Jews before Passover, for mixing with the dough for the Matzoth. The servant answered that he knew nothing about such things. Then the President lifted up a small vessel filled with a red liquid and asked the dumb one, by means of signs, if he had carried about such vessels. The dumb one thought that there was surely liquor in those vessels and that the President was offering him some of it. He nodded his head as if to

say "Yes, yes", and put his finger to his mouth, his face beaming. Father Thaddaeus asked to be heard and said that the dumb one was a reliable witness, because he had nodded and indicated with his finger that the blood was partaken of.

The defending counsel then rose, pulled out a knife, placed it against his throat, and turning to the dumb one pointed to the Rabbi and the vessels with the red liquid. The dumb one grew pale and shook his head to signify "No". The priest explained that the dumb one had thought the question was: "Did he want to kill the Rabbi", and therefore he indicated "No". This led to an argument between the priest and the defending counsel, so that the President had to call for order by ringing his bell.

The physician's daughter was the next witness. She related everything exactly as she had told the Cardinal, only she added that the old servant, when taking leave of her father, had told him not to worry about the heating in winter, as they would soon find another victim to look after the stoves on the Sabbath.

The defending counsel asked her if she recognized the faces of the servants, and she laughingly replied that she would know them in the dark. The defending counsel then demanded that the girl's father should be summoned to appear before the crowd. The President explained that before the proceedings started the father had been summoned in writing to appear as witness, but it seemed he had given up his house in Prague fourteen days earlier, and none knew where he was.

The President had scarcely finished when shouting was heard and a commotion arose amongst the crowd

outside. Everyone got frightened and rushed to the windows to see what had happened. It was indeed something miraculous. The real Yossel the Golem fought his way through the crowd, pulling with him the Christian servant-girl. It appeared that he had first driven to the house of the Rabbi, but on being told that the Rabbi had gone to the Court of Justice, he hurried there. The Golem and the servant-girl were admitted to the court-room, and amid universal astonishment, the Great Rabbi related all the steps he had taken to clear up the case. The President admired the Rabbi's wisdom, thanked him for having saved the court from delivering a wrong verdict, assigned him a seat of honour next to himself, and warmly shook his hand. Father Thaddaeus was greatly disconcerted, and the physician's daughter was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for false testimony.

The Children of the Two Friends
(Ibid.)

Two orphan boys, both called Berl, came to Prague from Roumania. One was dark-complexioned and was therefore named "Black Berl". The other had a reddish complexion and was named "Red Berl". They loved each other, lived together and shared their food. The town people soon got to like them, because they were industrious and honest. In time they managed to save some money and get married. Even after the wedding they could not separate and they decided to have a joint business. Their efforts were crowned with success and gradually they became rich. They bought a large stone building and lived next door to each other.

In one respect only their lives differed. Red Berl's sons and daughters were strong and healthy, whilst Black Berl's daughters were very delicate and did not all remain alive. The wives of the two Berls got on well with each other, although deep in her heart Black Berl's wife felt envious. But being a sensible and gentle woman she knew how to control her feelings. Only Esther, the midwife, who assisted both wives at the births of their children, noticed what went on in the heart of Black Berl's wife and pondered how she could help her to become happy.

It so happened that both wives were to be confined at one and the same time. Both gave birth to sons. Esther the midwife, being afraid that perhaps Black Berl's boy might not live, secretly changed the children. No one got to know about it, but in her diary, where all the births were entered, she made a note.

The women fed the children, not knowing they were not their own, and the boys grew up with strange parents. Esther died suddenly, and her daughter, who was likewise a midwife, kept her mother's diary, together with other things, in the cellar.

The children of the two Berls came of age and most of them got married. It was arranged between the two families that in order to strengthen the bonds of friendship between them, the only son of Black Berl should marry the daughter of Red Berl, a year younger than the boy. They felt greatly honoured when the Great Rabbi Loew consented to marry them. But a strange thing happened.

When the Rabbi lifted the cup of wine in order to pronounce the marriage blessing, the cup fell to the ground

and the wine was spilled. People thought that the accident was due to the great crush. More room was therefore made round the Rabbi and he was handed a second cup. But scarcely had the Rabbi begun "Blessed art thou" and reached the words "O Lord", when the cup again fell to the ground. The Rabbi grew pale and everyone was frightened. Meantime the beadle of the Synagogue had noticed that there was not enough wine in the bottle for another cup. It was the Great Rabbi Loew's custom to use only wine from his own cellar. Yossel the Golem was hurriedly dispatched to the Rabbi's house to fetch another bottle. But when the Golem reached the porch of the house, he was suddenly seen from the distance to stop and enter into a discussion with someone, although no one else could be seen beside him. At last the Golem entered the house, but he went not into the Rabbi's room, but next door into the court room. Here he wrote on a slip of paper the words: "The bridegroom and bride are brother and sister." He then hurried back and handed the Great Rabbi Loew the slip instead of the wine.

The Rabbi became greatly agitated. He looked inquiringly at the Golem, who pointed to the window of the Synagogue, as if he wanted to say that that was where the person who had told him the secret could be found. The Rabbi went there, looked at up the window for a few moments, and then returned to the assembly. He declared that the wedding could not take place that day, as a thorough investigation had first to be made. The wedding-meal which had been prepared was to be

Synagogue not to leave after the service. He hurriedly arranged for a partition of boards to be erected in a corner of the room, had a table brought into the room, and sat down at it, covered with his praying-shawl and wearing the Tephillin, together with two assessors. He sent the old Synagogue beadle, Abraham Chayim, to ask the two Berls, their wives, and the betrothed couple to come to the Synagogue. When they arrived he indicated a place for them at the table, opposite to himself. The Rabbi then called the Golem, gave him his stick and ordered him, in the hearing of the whole congregation, to go to the cemetery and summon the soul of the dead Esther to come there and explain everything. The people in the Synagogue got frightened and started to murmur, but the Rabbi rose and said: "I ask you not to be afraid and to keep quiet; no harm will befall you."

When Yossel the Golem returned, he approached the Rabbi and gave him back the stick. He pointed to the partition, indicating thereby that he had fulfilled the order and that the soul was now there. The congregation stood as if petrified, in deadly fear; all eyes were shut and no one moved.

The voice of the Rabbi could be heard speaking to the dead woman in a loud voice: "We, the earthly judges, request you, Esther, to tell us fully how it happened that this betrothed couple are brother and sister."

The dead Esther immediately started to relate how the two children were exchanged and why. She had done so without any evil intent, but out of pity, so that the two wives could live in peace. She herself had had no peace in her grave for twelve years. Only for the sake of the Great Rabbi Loew was she permitted to prevent the

wedding. Her soul could only enter into the bonds of eternal life if the betrothed couple and their parents would forgive her. To prove the truth of her words she referred them to her diary. The congregation only heard vague sounds, but the judges and the Berl families understood every word perfectly. When the dead woman had finished she broke out into sobs and the whole congregation cried with her.

The Rabbi sent for the diary, which was found after a long search. Although it was half-decayed, one could still decipher the words which confirmed the statement of the deceased. The Rabbi conferred with the other judges about the verdict. First of all the dead woman had to ask the betrothed couple's forgiveness. At once a voice could be heard calling out, amidst sobs: "I, Esther, who was your midwife, ask your forgiveness." The betrothed couple replied that they forgave her fully. Then the Rabbi and the assessors rose and the Rabbi proclaimed: "We, the earthly judges, acquit you, the midwife Esther, of all punishment; may the heavenly Court of Justice acquit you likewise. Go in peace, rest in peace, until the eternal peace."

The Rabbi ordered the partition to be removed, as a sign that the dead one was no longer there. He then pronounced the betrothed couple definitely as brother and sister. He proposed that if the two families, as was their intention, wished to become related, the only son of Black Berl should marry the bride, who was Red Berl's daughter, provided that all parties agreed. This they did and a week later the wedding was celebrated.

Why the Scroll of the Torah Fell to the Ground

(Ibid.)

One Day of Atonement a regrettable incident took place during the afternoon service in the Great Synagogue of the Great Rabbi Loew. One of the worshippers, who had been called up to lift the scroll of the Torah after the portion had been read out of it, lost the power of his hands and dropped the scroll. The Rabbi was greatly distressed. He proclaimed that all present should fast one day before the preparatory day for the coming Festival of Tabernacles. He felt, however, that more was required of him than this, and that he ought also to find out the cause of such an occurrence. Such things did not happen without a good and sufficient reason.

On the appointed fast day, the Rabbi prayed fervently to be given the answer in a dream, and he actually did dream that he heard a string of words without understanding their sense. He took note of the words, which consisted of fifteen letters, and it occurred to him to write down each letter on a separate slip of paper. He then called Yossel the Golem and told him to arrange the slips, which he had shuffled all together, in some sort of order on the table.

The Golem without looking very closely placed the slips next to each other. The letters formed no word, but it suddenly struck the Rabbi that they were the initial letters of a verse from the Bible, which formed part of the reading from the Torah on the Day of Atonement and referred to the sanctity of married life: "Moreover thou shalt not lie carnally with thy neighbour's wife, to defile thyself with her" (Lev. xviii, 20).

The Rabbi called the man who had dropped the Scroll of the Torah, took him to a closed room, and demanded of him firmly but kindly to confess that he had had guilty intercourse with the wife of another. This had been the reason for what happened on the Day of Atonement. The man saw that a denial was useless and impossible, he confessed his guilt and accepted the penance imposed on him. The woman who had sinned was punished according to the law.

The End of the Golem

(Ibid.)

Yitzchak ben Simon Cohen, the son-in-law of the Great Rabbi Loew, relates as follows:

After the Emperor Rudolf had issued an Edict that in his domain there must be no more cases of blood accusation, the Great Rabbi Loew felt that now the Passover Festival would proceed peacefully. So he called me, his son-in-law, Yitzchak Cohen, and his pupil Yacob Sasson Levy, the two of us who had taken part in the creation of the Golem, and declared that from now onwards the Golem would not be required any longer. He ordered the Golem not to sleep that night on his usual bed in the court-room, but to make it up in the loft of the Great Synagogue.

Towards two in the morning we went up to the loft where the Golem was sleeping. The old Synagogue beadle, Abraham Chayim, also had the Maharal's permission to follow upstairs, carrying two lighted candlesticks, but he had to stand a little on one side.

The three of us placed ourselves, contrary to what we

had done at his creation, at the head of the Golem, with our faces turned towards his feet, and we began to circle round him from left to right. There were seven circuits, the same as before. After each circuit we stopped and pronounced the formula which the Maharal had taught us. They were the same formulae as at the creation of the Golem, only they were recited in the opposite order. Anyone versed in the practical Cabbala and conversant with the *Book of the Creation* (*Sepher Hayetzirah*) knows the secret of the manner of creation and also of dissolution. After the seventh circuit the Golem remained lying like a mass of clay with the shape of a human being. The Maharal called the Synagogue servant and took the two candlesticks from him, and we removed the clothes from the Golem, leaving only the shirt. Having wrapped him in two old prayer-shawls, a number of which were lying about in the loft, we took the heavy mass and hid it amongst the many fragments of books in the loft, so that nothing of it could be seen. The Synagogue servant was ordered to burn the Golem's bed and clothes secretly.

Next day the news spread in the town that the Golem had run away and no one knew where. Only very few people were aware of what actually had taken place. A fortnight later the Great Rabbi Loew issued an order that no one was to enter the loft of the Synagogue to deposit praying-shawls or books which had become useless. People thought this was a precaution against the risk of fire, but the confidants of the Rabbi knew the real reason: it should not become known that Yossel the Golem was lying there.

The Real Motive of the Audience

(From the Supplement to the New Warsaw edition of Perles' Chronicles, 1864)

The Emperor Rudolf was torn by a peculiar inner discord: he hated the Jews, but whenever he met one, he felt drawn towards him. This caused him great unrest. He did not dare to tell anyone about it and his sufferings increased more and more. He felt that there must be a secret connected with it, but he could not get to the bottom of it.

Having heard of the Great Rabbi Loew, of his wisdom and prophetic gifts, he resolved to confide in him and to get to know from him the cause of his peculiar feelings. This led to the audience with the Emperor.

The Emperor put his question and the Rabbi asked to be allowed to stay in an adjoining room until the heavens would give him the answer. After a short while the Great Rabbi returned to the Emperor and made the following statement to him:

The Emperor's parents were not happy in their married life. The father, that is to say, the man whom the Emperor had always regarded as his father, owing to a physiological defect was unable to produce children. The marriage, therefore, was unhappy and childless. The father, the previous emperor, blamed the mother. This led to quarrels and the empress feared that the emperor would divorce her. She meditated how she could become the mother of a child.

Her eye fell on a fine-looking young man who frequently came to the Imperial Court. He was a Jew, who had to transact business with the officials of the palace.

The empress found an opportunity to call the young Jew to her private room, unknown to anyone. She fell more and more in love with him, confessed her passion, and demanded his love in return. The young Jew, however, was pious and managed to resist her seductions. Once when she had enticed him again into her room and he remained adamant, she flared up and declared that if he did not listen to her she would induce the emperor to issue an edict that all Jews in the land should be destroyed.

In his perplexity and not knowing what to do the Jew turned to the Rabbinical College, asking them to decide if he was justified in committing the sin, to save the lives of so many thousands of his co-religionists. After long deliberation the Court of the Rabbis came to the conclusion that the Jew was permitted to satisfy the wish of the empress. The young man demanded that the verdict should be given to him in writing.

When he went to the palace, he took the document with him and managed to hide it in an earthenware pot under the threshold of one of the rooms. The secret intercourse between the empress and the young Jew resulted in the birth of the Emperor Rudolf.

The Emperor was greatly moved on hearing this. The Great Rabbi Loew took him to the threshold, underneath which the earthenware pot was found undamaged. The Emperor now understood the conflict in his soul. He was freed from the oppression which had weighed upon him and remained all his life a friend of the Jews.

The Death of the Great Rabbi Loew

I. The Posen Version

(From Knoop's *Sagen and Erzählungen aus der Provinz Posen*, 1893, retold in J. Bergmann's *Die Legenden der Juden*, 1919)

One night before the High Festivals, Rabbi Loew noticed a light in the Synagogue opposite his house. He went there and saw on the praying daïs a man of sinister appearance, sharpening a glittering knife in front of a scroll with a long list of names. Rabbi Loew ran away in terror, but when he recovered his self-possession, he saw clearly what was the matter. The plague had begun to spread amongst the community and that Apparition in the Synagogue was the Angel of Death, threatening the members of the community. He took courage, went again to the Synagogue, snatched the list away from the Angel of Death, and hurried back to his room.

He looked at the list containing the names of the men and women of the community whom he had saved from death by the plague. But a piece of the list had remained in the hand of the Angel of Death, and on it was the name of Rabbi Loew. When the festivals were over, the Rabbi fell ill and died.

II. The Prague Version

(From Alois Jirásek, in the Czecho-Jewish Calendar 1913/14. Retold by J. Günzig in *Die Wundermänner im Jüdischen Volk*, 1921)

Rabbi Loew was very old. His cabbalistic power had always prevailed over the Angel of Death whenever he

had approached. Death therefore tried a ruse. He hid in the heart of a magnificent dark red rose, which the Rabbi's favourite grandchild presented to her grandfather. (According to Jirásek, it was his wife who gave him the rose to remind him of his youthful happiness.) As the old man accepted the flower, half gladly, half reluctantly, Death claimed his victory.

Chronology of the Life of the Great Rabbi Loew and the publication of his works

1512 (?)	Born in Posen.
1553–1573	Rabbi of the whole of Moravia.
1573–1584	Lived in Prague.
1578	*Gur Arye.*
1582	*Gevurath Adonai.*
1584	*Sermon on the Day of Atonement.*
1588–1592	Lived in Prague.
1589	*Drush Naẓ.*
1589	*Derech Hachayim.*
1592–1597	Chief Rabbi of Posen.
1593	*Drush al Hatorah.*
1593	*Drush al Hamiṣvah.*
1595	*Netivoth Olam.*
1597–1609	Chief Rabbi of Prague.
1597	*Ṣiak al Agunah.*
1597	*Hesped al Günzburg.*
1599	*Tiphereth Yisrael.*
1600	*Be'er Hagolah.*
1600	*Neṣṣach Yisrael.*
1600	*Or Chadash.*
1600	*Ner Miṣvah.*
1609	Died in Prague.

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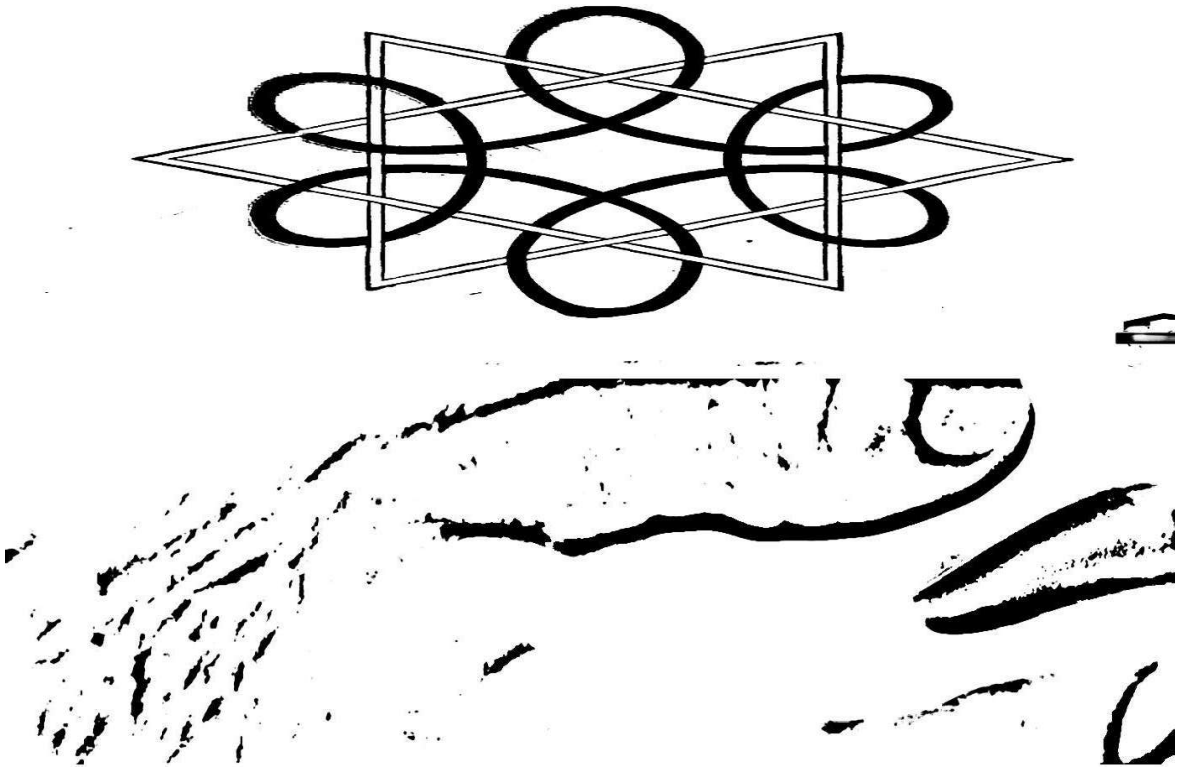
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